



## **The portrayal of the working-class and working-class culture in Barry Hines's novels**

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**The Portrayal of the Working-class and Working-class Culture  
in Barry Hines's Novels.**

**Submitted by Simone Turnbull**

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Sheffield Hallam University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

**August 2014**

## **Abstract.**

### **Portrayal of working-class and working-class culture in Barry Hines's novels.**

This thesis examines Barry Hines's representation of contemporary British working-class and working-class culture. The corpus includes the writer's nine novels: *The Blinder* published in 1966, *A Kestrel for a Knave* in 1968, *First Signs* in 1972, *The Gamekeeper* in 1975, *The Price of Coal* in 1979, *Looks and Smiles* in 1981, *Unfinished Business* in 1983, *The Heart of It* in 1994 and finally *Elvis over England* in 1998. The written work also comprises the play entitled *Two Men from Derby* which was first shown on BBC 1 on 21 February 1976 and subsequently broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 23 October 1976. Besides the scope of the author's literary output has been enhanced thanks to the adaptation of four of his narratives to cinema through his collaboration with the film-maker Ken Loach. In 1969 the novel entitled *The Kestrel for a Knave* was adapted into the film named *Kes*. *The Price of Coal* was first written for a television series which broadcast in 1977 before being published in book form. *The Gamekeeper*, was adapted into a film in 1980. *Looks and Smiles* won the Young Cinema Award in the 1981 Cannes Film Festival. Barry Hines's position as both a novelist as a scriptwriter has enabled his message to be more widespread.

It is the tenor of his message that I study and analyse through the study of his literary output which spans the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I wish to question his use of supposedly straightforward realism, verging on naturalism, through the delineation of the geographical, the human, the social and the cultural backdrop. The writer's literary treatment combines up-to-date details with traditional tenets which conjure up a nostalgic backdrop in the face of the economic, historical and social upheavals of the era. The outlook which remains steeped in the past underscore the timelessness of the working-class according to the narrator. Yet is this definition still relevant as the recent re-shaping of the microcosm is acknowledged, yet downplayed. The overall feeling of everlastingness highlight the entrapment of the contemporary working-class members who cannot come to terms with the successive changes undergone by British society. The writer's staunch empathy and his use of humour assuage the bleakness of the habitat and of the social conditions. His optimism contrasts with the current virulent contempt levelled at the working-class as he advocates active participation as the only way-out.

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## **Introduction.**

At first sight the portrayal of the British working-class and of popular culture in Barry Hines's books may appear somewhat simplistic and naïve and as though it was written for a young audience. This apparently very simple depiction, however, succeeds far more forcefully than a more complex presentation. Realism is the dominant paradigm of the narrations under scrutiny and pervades the author's whole literary delineation of this social group. It is precisely the author's rendition of realist geographical, historical, social and human data that I endeavour to study and analyse.

The novels include *The Blinder* published in 1966, *A Kestrel for a Knave* in 1968, *First Signs* in 1972, *The Gamekeeper* in 1975, *The Price of Coal* in 1979, *Looks and Smiles* in 1981, *Unfinished Business* in 1983, *The Heart of It* in 1994 and finally *Elvis over England* written in 1998. The scope of the literary output has been intensified thanks to the filming by Ken Loach of three of the above-mentioned narratives. The film *Kes* from *A Kestrel for a Knave* was produced in 1969, one year after its publication, and still ranks seventh in the British Film Institute's Top Ten British Films. *The Price of Coal* was commissioned by the BBC for the *Play for Today* television series in 1977 before its publication in book form two years later. The adaptation of the novel *The Gamekeeper* was released in 1980. The collaboration between Barry Hines and the film director ended with *Looks and Smiles*. This film won the Prize for Contemporary Cinema at the Cannes Festival in 1981 and was shown on Central Television in 1982. The corpus is also composed of the play entitled *Two Men from Derby* first televised on BBC1 on 21 February 1976. The award-winning British television drama: *Threads*, written by Barry Hines and directed by Mick Jackson, is also included. This docudrama relating the account of a nuclear war on the city of Sheffield was shown in 1984. I have purposely chosen to include the different facets to illustrate the variety of Barry Hines's artistic output. My selection also relies on the fact that these narratives span crucial decades in the history of the British working-class. The last decades of the 20th century encapsulate historical, economic and political upheavals which have affected all the components of the everyday living conditions of the working-class members. This era is synonymous with economic recession and its corollary: soaring unemployment. The changes also entail the feminisation of the work market and the de-industrialisation of Britain. This period therefore constitutes the backdrop to the outright re-shuffling of the traditional working-class culture threatening it with extinction. Barry Hines's literary works occupy a

unique position against this historical background as they span the whole evolution – not to say, revolution.

Barry Hines's main motive lies in his political stance which he asserts through his novels and scripts. His awareness stems from his youth as he recalls in a partly-autobiographical anthology published in 2009. In the chapter entitled *The Big Match* he relates his memories as a working-class grammar school pupil. His discovery of the social inequalities is summed up thus: 'What had been much more was the political experience, seeing the class system at work close-up.'<sup>1</sup> The scathing censure of the British class-ridden society recurs throughout his works and structures his acceptance of the concept of class-consciousness. The writer intertwines different tiers of the definition propounded by Ira Katznelson and quoted by Dennis Dworkin in *Class Struggles*. Barry Hines's stance combines the abstract 'purely unequal relationship between capital and labour intrinsic to capitalism' with the structural 'social organisation of society (...) involving, for example, workplace social relations, the structures of labor markets, connections between home and work, and the organization of space, for example, working-class neighbourhoods.'<sup>2</sup> The staunch socialist author lays the stress on the additional facet of class-consciousness set out by the critic, that is to say 'the process whereby groups of people develop a common understanding of the social system or come to share a set of values as a result of their experience of class relationships.'<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines hopefully advocates a further step which would result in active political participation. The prime importance laid on class-consciousness shapes the plots and the depictions of the characters. The literary treatment is redolent of the definition proposed by Raymond Williams in *The Welsh Industrial Novel*:

The abstracted categories of "social" and "personal" are here, in these specific conditions, moreover, of the great majority of human beings – interfused and inextricable though not always indistinguishable. The privileged distances of another kind of fiction, where people can "live simply as human beings", beyond the pressures and interruptions and accidents of society, are in another world or more specifically in another class.<sup>4</sup>

Barry Hines's presentation of his protagonists vividly illustrates the inter-relationships between the individual and the social microcosm they belong to. The overriding concept of class-consciousness is all the more acute as there are very few contacts with the other classes.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 90

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, Pearson, 2007, p. 4

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 4

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, University College, Cardiff, 1979, p. 12

The writer's literary realism complies with what Raymond Williams qualifies as 'the realist tradition in fiction' in *The Long Revolution*. The researcher's analysis reads as follows:

Neither element, neither society nor the individual, is there as a priority. The society is not a background against which the personal relationships are studied, nor are the individuals merely illustrations of aspects of the way of life. Every aspect of personal life is radically affected by the quality of the general life, yet the general life is seen at its most important in completely person terms.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines retraces the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through economic and historical data, and the resulting alterations to the urban setting. Yet Barry Hines downplays the physical and social changes contrary to researchers who propound the demise of the traditional working-class. In the sociological treatise entitled *Chavs* and eloquently subtitled *The Demonization of the Working Class* published in 2011, Owen Jones spells out the new social set up thus: 'We're all middle-class now, runs the popular mantra – all except for a feckless, recalcitrant rump of the old working class.'<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines refutes this statement which questions the scope of the novelist's message. Who is he writing about? Does his cast comprise the whole class or just a contemptible underclass? It also challenges the audience targeted. Who is his message aimed at; is he writing for, or on behalf of, the working-class? As the spokesman of a class which Noam Chomsky has qualified in *Keeping The Rabble in Line* by the vivid phrase: 'They Don't Even Know That They Don't Know'<sup>3</sup>, will he contribute to enlighten their outlook, or that of the other social groups? The uniqueness of Barry Hines's literary works grants him the role of the advocate of an inarticulate class.

Barry Hines was born in Barnsley, a South Yorkshire mining village, in 1939. His working-class lineage and commitment are highlighted by the writer, Mark Hodgkinson, in the introduction to Barry Hines's anthology of essays, unpublished short stories and poems, entitled *This Artistic Life*, published in 2009. The prime importance of his social and family background is stressed thus:

He writes a great deal about the mining industry and two incidents in particular that have stayed with him always – the death of his granddad in a pit accident and the time he was berated by a neighbour for choosing to work (briefly) down the mine.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Columbia University Press, 1961, p. 278

<sup>2</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 6

<sup>3</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Keeping the Rabble in Line*, AK Press, 1994, p. 33

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Hebden Bridge, Pomona, 2009, Introduction, p. IX

The uniqueness of Barry Hines's part in British contemporary literature stems from his position as both inside the working-class and outside looking in. His past activities range from working shortly as a miner, then as a teacher of Physical Education in secondary schools from 1960 to 1972, and becoming involved in Creative Writing at the University of Sheffield, and lastly being a full-time writer. This particular position explains the first-hand testimony voiced throughout his writings. His constant close links with the working-class solves the recurrent question of 'Working-class and / or socialist?' as H. Gustav Klaus wonders in *The Literature of Labour*.<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines's specific status spans this discrepancy as it borrows from both viewpoints as the definition reads, 'working-class is a descriptive term denoting the fiction produced by worker-writers (that is, authors still in the production process or subjected to unemployment) and by writers with a working-class background depicting their milieu of origin'.<sup>2</sup> The author remains loyal to his roots and faithful to his humanist creed in his rendering of the geographical, historical, social, cultural and human working-class background. His empathy for the workers underpins his obvious political message. His outstanding feat is the fact that his most famous novel, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, has become a classic by being part of the school curriculum. He modestly acknowledges this feat as he underlines his unflagging endeavour to reach the popular classes. The enduring success of the novel illustrates the timelessness of the plot and background which has amounted to the enlightenment of the readership, not only for a set decade, but for succeeding generations of working-class and middle-class children alike. This paradoxical achievement stems from the stress laid on the enduring core of the working-class which outlasts the succeeding fleeting fads.

The writer, Mark Hodkinson, pays a hearty tribute to Barry Hines in the introduction to *This Artistic Life* as he acknowledges the impact of his influence. Yet he simultaneously ponders on the contemporary relevance of the description and his assertion implies that the outlook is out-dated and steeped in bygone decades: 'He, among a handful of others, had made me want to be a writer in the first place. Every day he is with me, his influence, as I try to emulate the honesty and compassion he brings to his work, in my own.'<sup>3</sup> Yet the question about the relevance of the novel is raised as follows:

Barry has always been proud to write about his class but it's apparent, reading him again, that this great body of people has changed, moved on. They live in different places now, do different jobs and have different aspirations and values.

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<sup>1</sup> H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour*, The Harvester Press Ltd, 1985, p. 107

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 107

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Hebden Bridge, Pomona, 2009, Introduction, pp. VIII & IX



(...)So, trade unionism is marginalised, the Labour Party has forsaken its roots and, suddenly, writers like Barry Hines start to feel like a history lesson.<sup>1</sup>

Surprisingly, little literary criticism has been written about Barry Hines's works in spite of the primordial role played by his novel entitled *A Kestrel for a Knave* in the representation of the 20th century British working-class. However, the responses that exist are all extremely laudatory. The most eulogistic quote is uttered by Nigel Gray in *The Silent Majority*, subtitled *A Study of the Working Class in Post-War British Fiction*. This critical essay was published in 1973, and consequently deals only with *A Kestrel for a Knave*. The praise is candidly expressed in the very first lines of the second part of the study ironically called: *School Days are the Happiest Days of your Life*. The panegyric reads: 'Barry Hines has written a little book that is almost faultless. He is completely free of the 'hero' mentality that mars Sillitoe's work'.<sup>2</sup> The critic's enthusiasm never wanes as he compares Barry Hines's literary achievement with other working-class writers and extols his realistic representation of the working-class members:

The really good writer says what he wants to say without manipulating his characters. Sillitoe, for all his talent, tenacity and cunning does not have the art of David Storey or Barry Hines, who are able to stay out of the way.<sup>3</sup>

Nigel Gray's unwavering commendation never questions the realism of the setting in *Kes* which he compares again and again with his own childhood. He epitomises the author's reliance on implicit images of working-class daily lives through the following excerpt from *The Silent Majority* as he justly asserts, 'Without the novel ever taking us into a mine, we can get some idea of the horror of burrowing in the ground.'<sup>4</sup> The issue of realism based on concrete examples gathered from delving into his past is similarly hinted at by Jeremy Hawthorn in his essay entitled *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* as follows:

Hines has worked steadily in veins known to him from his youth in Barnsley, in the West Riding, from his vision of how an undersized lad from a one-parent family could fulfil himself in his relationship with animals to his most recent novels about young people and women struggling to make a living ridden by slump.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Hebden Bridge, Pomona, 2009, Introduction, pp. VIII & IX

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Gray, *The Silent Majority*, Barnes and Noble, 1973, p. 25

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 132

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 34

<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p.99

Jeremy Hawthorn's literary critique was published in 1984 and analyses two of the novels of our corpus, namely *A Kestrel for a Knave* and *The Price of Coal*, respectively published in 1968 and 1979. The study stresses the accuracy of the descriptions relying on naturalism with the use of minute, even trivial details:

For Hines, it is simply there: his unblinking naturalism presents the life of the housing estates and the working men's clubs as just a mixture like any other, although we can infer a cutting-edge of solidarity with the workers from the advantage given to the anti-Royal wit of the miners in *The Price of Coal*.<sup>1</sup>

The researcher underlines the message conveyed by Barry Hines in spite of – or maybe because of – his subdued tone. The author's commitment seems obvious, 'for Hines, it is a matter of being loyal to a class: he sees it as political work to present the dilemmas and qualities of the unprivileged'.<sup>2</sup> The critic insists on the uniqueness of this writer's literary treatment of the contemporary British working-class as he is content with showing, without proselytising. The plots follow the traditional rules of the working-class novels as Jeremy Hawthorn delineates the continuity within this literary vein:

His best-known novel *A Kestrel for a Knave* (better-known by the title of the film adaptation *Kes*) is a proletarian novel still close in spirit to Lawrence as well as Brierley and the Sillitoe of *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*: the working-class community is perceived negatively by an alienated subject, Billy Casper, representative of a humanity fiercely resisting incorporation into any of the available forms of social participation – family, school, work (Billy will not follow his brother Jud down the pit), the law.<sup>3</sup>

The originality of Barry Hines's writings lies in his treatment of raw materials which are part and parcel of working-class culture. The immutable and timeless everyday items build up a stereotyped backdrop which strikes a chord with the readers. The following excerpt from *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* by Jeremy Hawthorn encapsulates the specific scope of this literary trait:

Barry Hines's class-conscious literary experiments are an achievement in themselves. Because they are politically and artistically progressive, they demonstrate and demand further needs, beyond formal innovation: for a socially responsible press, a democratically-controlled television medium, a people's film industry; as well as a socialist literature.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p. 100

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 99

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 30

<sup>4</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p.32

The basic literary ingredients do not alter, as Ian Haywood underlines in the following excerpt from *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting*:

The response of the working-class novelists to the permissive agenda of the 1960s and 1970s suggests that the new causes of freedoms did not permeate very far into working-class culture and consciousness. While some writers explore the themes of social and sexual emancipation, the majority of texts also articulate the persistence of the class boundaries and traditional forms of oppression and deprivation.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's plots and depictions are reminiscent of the traditional working-class narrations as the stress is laid on the relentless impact of outside economic factors on the everyday life of the protagonists. The characters' vulnerability and despair are outweighed by economic and historical events. The writer just shows as Ian Haywood's analysis in *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* concludes: 'Kes shows in stark terms the re-emergence in the 1960s of an affluent 'underclass' of the socially disadvantaged and dysfunctional.'<sup>2</sup> The criticism of the educational system remains traditional and relies on the age-old British class structure as Ian Haywood asserts, 'The novel has the radical aim of exposing the failure of egalitarian ideology in general, and the educational system in particular.'<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines manages to insert the plights of his protagonists into the web of history through slight references. Ian Haywood underlines the everlastingness of a working-class culture which survives the succeeding historical and economic upheavals as he comments:

Barry Hines's *Looks and Smiles* (1981) took the temperature of the early years of Thatcherism by revisiting the social territory of *Love on the Dole*. The novel can also be read as a transplanting of *Kes* into the 1980s, where the problem for the school-leaving generation is no longer 'affluent' dehumanization but the precise opposite: economic blight.<sup>4</sup>

Different places, different periods, yet Barry Hines's novels easily fit into the tradition of working-class literature as John Kirk points out in his critical essay entitled *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*, published in 2003. His analysis of *A Kestrel for a Knave* concludes: 'There is considerable consonance between this novel and some themes taken up by the proletarian novels of the 1930s.'<sup>5</sup> Work – and late the lack of work -

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<sup>1</sup> Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting*; Northcote House; Plymouth; 1997; p. 127

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 134

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 135

<sup>4</sup> Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting*; Northcote House; Plymouth; 1997; p. 142

<sup>5</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 92

recurs as the central theme as John Kirk argues: ‘The Price of Coal and Looks and Smiles offer more politicized representations of a working-class experience of work or of no work.’<sup>1</sup> The prime importance of work is a recurrent fixture of working-class novels and binds the whole social group together as Raymond Williams avers in *The Welsh Industrial Novel*: ‘In the world of the industrial novel (...) work is pressing and formative.’<sup>2</sup> The solidarity engendered constitutes an equally crucial facet of working-class literature in the face of the highly-structured class-ridden British society. John Kirk’s study of *The Price of Coal* demonstrates the realistic set-up of the segmentation of the classes as he explains the impact of this novel thus:

Hines foregrounds the political awareness of the colliers, and their keen recognition of the class-divided nature of British society a condition embodied in the imminent arrival of royalty and the often absurd lengths to which management is willing to go to make the visit as comfortable as possible. Work is the central organising feature of the novel, not only its dangers, but its capacity to engender collective solidarities and a more radical value-system and structure of feeling than that associated with the dominant.<sup>3</sup>

The economic ups and downs of British economy during the last decades of the 20th century with the succession of periods of full employment and rampant unemployment are realistically enumerated. The bleakness of *Looks and Smiles*, set in the early 1980s, is propped up by accurate historical data as John Kirk’s following excerpt from *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class* encapsulates: ‘The social and personal costs of Thatcherism are made quite plain’.<sup>4</sup> The plot, nonetheless, gains an a-temporal and universal significance thanks to timeless details which are part and parcel of working-class culture at large. The general characterisation supersedes the specific items appertaining to the set temporal backdrop. The depiction delves in stereotypes as John Kirk sums up: ‘Personal despair is framed by public squalor, the metonymic collocation of these fragments signalling a general decay. The detritus of a market economy in crisis suggests that human life, when there is no hope, will become part of that same waste’.<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines’s literary style is redolent of previous works as John Kirk’s general statement from *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class* implies: ‘The naturalistic register defines the nature of deprivation, and

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<sup>1</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 92

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, University College, Cardiff, 1979, p.12

<sup>3</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 92

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 93

<sup>5</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 93

the pressures and constraints that determine everyday life. This project is characteristic of working-class writing, as we have seen, hence naturalism's popularity as a mode of representation'.<sup>1</sup> In spite of the ineluctable changes which have re-shaped the structure of the working-class Barry Hines's faith in the resilience of its members remains staunch as John Kirk underlines: 'Yet the narrative is so structured as to remind us of the collective values and strong resistance still embedded in such communities, despite the havoc wreaked by unemployment and low-paid work'.<sup>2</sup> It is precisely this indomitable resilience that amounts to the sole gleam of hope throughout Barry Hines's literary works. The uniqueness of the writer's literary feat is lauded as follows by Graham Holderness in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Jeremy Hawthorn:

However, almost from the outset, certainly from *A Kestrel of a Knave* onward, Hines has found his own voice. It is not only an angry voice denouncing class prejudice and class privilege, and attacking the shortcomings of the once celebrated affluent society. It has also a cautiously hopeful ring emanating from the creative, defiant, and ultimately invincible qualities which his working-class characters display, often against overwhelming opposition.<sup>3</sup>

From the previous literary accounts it is obvious that Barry Hines's writings do not merely show; more importantly they question and call to task. They spell out the failure of society to protect the downtrodden. Billy Casper has been let down by the education system just as Mick Walsh.

The last four decades of the 20th century spanned by the nine novels and the play of our corpus amount to the classical economic ups and downs with the succession of recession and relative affluence. But more importantly this epoch means, according to numerous sociologists and writers, the advent of a new working-class due to the de-industrialisation of Britain and globalisation. The literary critic Fredric Jameson retraces the relentless sweeping metamorphosis by underlining the multifarious facets of this social re-structuring as follows in *The Cultural Turn* sub-titled *Writings on the Postmodern, 1983 – 1998*:

At some point following World War Two a new kind of society began to emerge (variously described as post-industrial society, multinational capitalism, consumer society, media society and so forth). New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society; the replacement of the old tension between city and

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<sup>1</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff; 2003, p. 93

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., pp. 93 & 94

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p. 100

country, centre and province, by the suburb and by universal standardization; the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of automobile culture – these are some of the features which would seem to mark a radical break with that older pre-war society in which high modernism was still an underground force.<sup>1</sup>

But even though the 1960s and 1970s were synonymous with affluence and employment, the strict social barriers within the British society remained just as stringent as ever according to Raymond Williams's comments: 'The overwhelming emphasis in the ideology of affluence on money and consumption may well have had the unintended effect of stimulating an awareness of relative deprivation and thereby contributed to the wage militancy of the 1960s and 70s'.<sup>2</sup>

The turning point in the history of the British working-class is without doubt the early 1980s with the election of Margaret Thatcher and the drastic measures which were taken in the face of the drastic economic recession. These crucial issues crop up in the numerous essays dealing with the epoch. The virulence of the analyses of the policies highlights the importance of the era in the structuring of the class system. The novelist, Philip Hensher uses precise historical references profusely as landmarks in the metamorphosis of the British society. His narration entitled *The Northern Clemency* teems with details which corroborate the flight from the working-class by the affluent representatives. The miners' strike of 1984 is mentioned thus: 'Outside, there was a small group of women, shaking their tin cans. Not a charity, but what you expected more and more in Sheffield in the last few weeks, a collection labelled 'Dig Deep for the Miners'.<sup>3</sup> The laws passed, such as the selling of council houses, are vehemently condemned as the main character exclaims: 'Does it never cross your mind, the struggles ordinary working-class people face, and then participating in flogging off public assets for a cheap profit, bribing people like that to keep fucking Thatcher in power?'<sup>4</sup> Specific geographical and historical data pitch the narration in Sheffield in the early 1980s. The Falklands War waged against Argentina from April to June 1982 is also mentioned as one of the protagonists reflects: 'but the year before, the only reason he'd not voted for Mrs T was the nonsense in the Falklands.'<sup>5</sup> This plethora of details contrasts with Barry Hines's sobriety as he implicitly relies on the fact that the readers are privy to this knowledge. Besides he

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<sup>1</sup> Fredric Jameson *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983 – 1998*; Verso; London; 2009; pp. 19 & 20

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *Politics and Letters*; New Left Books; London; 1979, p. 336

<sup>3</sup> Philip Hensher, *The Northern Clemency*, Fourth Estate, London, 2008, p. 389

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 407

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 505

ignores the financial betterment enjoyed by some workers in spite of rampant unemployment. The sociologist, Michael Collins ascribes the rift within the popular class to this phenomenon in the following excerpt from *The Likes of Us* thus: 'The terms 'Essex Man' and 'Thatcher's children' were touted about as shorthand for those who had made it into the lower middle class via new money, rather than into the middle class via education.'<sup>1</sup> The outright re-modelling of the British working-class during the 1980s is echoed by John Kirk in *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*. The researcher draws the pessimistic conclusion that this sweeping metamorphosis spells out the demise of the old-fashioned British working-class:

The 1980s, and the politics of Thatcherism, saw the 'deconstruction' of the British working-class, through a decade or more of economic, political and social change, often defined by commentators as the shift from Fordist industrial economy to the age of post-Fordism and the rise of the information society.<sup>2</sup>

The recurring allusions to the traditional working-class illustrate the impact of the clichés which build up the common national culture. The up-to-date delineation of the British society by Ian Haywood in *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* published in 1997 draws the revised strata of modern British society:

Traditional working-class communities organized around large-scale manufacturing industry have all but disappeared from British social life; the social imagery of such communities has become nostalgic, while the 'affluent' working class has been heralded by conservative politicians as evidence of a new 'classlessness'. The replacement of productive labour by 'service' and leisure industries, the trend towards low-paid, insecure and non-unionized labour, massive long-term unemployment, reliance on welfare benefits – this erosion of working-class autonomy, the 'feminization' of the economy, are processes that have accelerated the fragmentation of class-consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

This pessimistic outlook echoes the conclusion drawn by the literary critic, John Kirk, in *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class* which spells out the sheer disappearance of the working-class in a post-industrial and post-modernist society. The new assessment is presented as 'post-working-class, where locality, culture and political autonomy are essential replacements for class identity. Class belongs to an older understanding of the

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes Of Us*, Granta, London, 2005, pp. 209 & 210

<sup>2</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting*; Northcote House; Plymouth; 1997; p. 141

social, a modernist moment eclipsed by the eclecticism of the post-modern.’<sup>1</sup> The critic’s analysis goes one step further as the foreseen vanishing of the British working-class is inherent to globalisation. Its assimilation within a universal entity would amount to the outright obliteration of its geographical, historical, human, sociological and cultural idiosyncrasies. The critic shores his assertion thanks to political examples as he reflects: ‘Marxists, for instance, have long insisted on the inevitable global reach of capitalism and thus the emergence of its dialectical opposite, a global proletariat.’<sup>2</sup> The notion of a worldwide workforce is championed by Guy Standing in *The Precariat*, ominously subtitled *The New Dangerous Class*, published in 2011. He forecasts the advent of an international working-class or rather popular class which would flout the geographical, historical and social limitations: ‘Although the precariat is not yet a class-for-itself, it is a class-in-the-making, increasingly able to identify what it wishes to combat and what it wants to construct.’<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines denies the new partitioning of contemporary British society. He counters the insidious de-construction of the British working-class and its alleged demise. On the contrary he enhances the inherent substratum which underlies and welds the social group. The author’s empathy for the members of the working-class remains constant and deep-rooted throughout his literary works.

The first part of my study deals with the geographical setting and scans the different concepts from the largest component down to the closest geographically and personally. This chapter scrutinises the concrete background by delineating the diverse and complementary elements such as the region, the town, the district and, last but not least, the household. Yet the setting is merely sketched through light strokes and the absence of real names succeeds in drawing an immutable and a-temporal backdrop. The author’s native area and the town of Sheffield are outlined without actual reference to topographic elements. Even though the major changes which have reshaped the urban scenery inhabited by the working-class from the late 1960s until the late 1990s are acknowledged and depicted, their impact toned down. The familiarity construed by the permanence of the habitat contrasts with the bleak conclusion drawn by the literary critic, John Kirk in *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*: ‘The spatial displacements of class became a distinctive feature of the period, as working-class communities, often based around traditional industries of coal, steel and the

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<sup>1</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 179

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 179

<sup>3</sup> Guy Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class*. Bloombury Academic; 2011, p. 155



shipyards and docks, were closed down in rapid succession.’<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines’s depiction of the geographical data runs counter to this loss of human and social bearings.

The second chapter of my analysis scrutinises the portrayals of the representatives of the working-class by Barry Hines. The gamut of the diverse characters merges the different protagonists from the typical image of the working-class member, the typical male, the typical female and the concept of the working-class hero or anti-hero. The description of the inhabitants of the working-class district remains steeped in traditional imagery as it pitches an age-old hierarchical set-up within the social group, within the family, within the couple and between adults and children. The status of the male characters in the novels by Barry Hines of our study is reminiscent of Richard Hoggart’s family hierarchy in his seminal work entitled *The Uses of Literacy* published in 1957. The patriarchal figure is summed up as follows: ‘The point of departure for an understanding of the position of the working-class father in his home is that he is the boss there, the ‘master of his own house’.<sup>2</sup> The bluntness of the statement is smoothed over by the following explanation: ‘This does not mean that he is by any means an absolute ruler or that he gets or expects his own way in everything. It often accompanies a carefulness, a willingness to help and be ‘considerate’, to be ‘a good husband.’<sup>3</sup> Syd in *The Price of Coal* and Mr Walsh in *Looks and Smiles* embody this cliché. Similarly, the laudatory picture of the mother drawn by Richard Hoggart applies to Kath, Syd’s wife, in *The Price of Coal*, to Mrs Walsh in *Looks and Smiles*, and to Pearl, Eddie’s wife, in *Elvis over England*. The eulogy reads: ‘She is then the pivot of the home, as it is practically the whole of her world.’<sup>4</sup>

The increasing number of women holding professional careers in contemporary working-class literature amounts to the debunking of the stereotyped male status as the breadwinner. Barry Hines’s novels are no exception and the main reason for Eddie’s despondency lies in his joblessness whereas Pearl has a few menial jobs to make ends meet. This upheaval within the family and the couple posits the role of the working-class hero. It is certainly no longer the chauvinistic, womanizer, boozier typical male bully. This new image which Jeremy Hawthorn defines thus: ‘whereas in much of his (Alan Sillitoe’s) fiction it is only the man, the impatient, overweening, anarchic man, who is fully created and the other

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<sup>1</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 105

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 41

characters are a foil to him.’<sup>1</sup> Such characters do exist in Barry Hines’s narrations, for example Jud in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, but they do not stand out as the heroes. What about the hero image: is it the young footballer in *The Blinder*, is it the puny and cowering Billy Casper in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, is it the committed communist in *First Signs*, is it the staid hard-working Syd in *The Price of Coal*, is it the desperate Mick Walsh in *Looks and Smiles*, is it the heart-broken and despondent Eddie in *Elvis over England*? Whatever the choice, they all differ from the brash Arthur Seaton in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe, and the self-assured hero in *The Right True End*, the last volume of Stan Barstow’s trilogy: ‘So, although not one hundred percent my own man, I am at least a sight better off than them. I’ve got a job that I like, do well, and get good money for. I’m going on thirty-six years old, sound in wind and limb, white, Anglo-Saxon, nobody’s no butt, and carrying no chip. I have a car.’<sup>2</sup>

The third chapter analyses the literary treatment of the social background. The group simplistically labelled as ‘them’ is studied through its main characteristics consonant with the age-old simplistic Manichean split which dictates the social contacts in the writings by Barry Hines. The social hierarchy harks on the stereotyped ‘them’ and ‘us’ division in accordance to Richard Hoggart’s definition in *The Uses of Literacy*. The decried and hated group is delineated thus:

The world of ‘Them’ is the world of the bosses, whether these bosses are private individuals, or as is increasingly the case today, public officials. ‘Them’ may be, as occasion requires, anyone from the classes outside other the few individuals. A general practitioner, if he wins his way by his devotion to his patients, is not, as a general practitioner, one of ‘Them’; he and his wife, as social beings, are. A parson may or may not be regarded as one of ‘Them’, according to his behaviour. ‘Them’ includes the policemen and those civil servants or local-authority employees whom the working-class meet – teachers, the school attendance man, ‘the Corporation’, the local bench.<sup>3</sup>

This detailed enumeration underlines the miscellaneous group which the workers loathe and mistrust. The traditional outlook remains the norm in the novels of our corpus. I have chosen to single out the following members of ‘them’: the police, the army, the bosses and the teachers, in accordance with Jackson Brian’s list drawn up in *Working-Class Community*, a critical essay on Alan Sillitoe. The age-old social rift is taken for granted. The

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p. 104

<sup>2</sup> Stan Barstow, *The Right True End*, Billing and Sons Limited, Guildford, 1982, p 549

<sup>3</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin, 1981, p.72

agreement is tacitly accepted since no explanations whatsoever are given. The connivance stems from the common knowledge between the writer and the reader.

I wish to conclude my study by analysing the rendering by Barry Hines of working-class culture. It is reminiscent of Raymond Williams's definition in *Culture and Society 1780– 1950* published in 1958 as he concludes: 'We may now see what is properly meant by 'working-class culture'. It is not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of language; it is, rather, the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions, which proceed from this.'<sup>1</sup> This welds the group together, just as the consumption of cultural goods which some sociologists disparagingly attribute to 'popular culture', and even 'mass culture'.

The cultural items I have singled out: television, cinema and literature, are obviously affected by the laws of the consumer society and obey its strict limitations. Yet Barry Hines tones down the commercialisation of all facets of culture. The cultural allusions overlap the different generations. This continuity contrasts with John Fiske's assertion that working-class culture is dead, and has been replaced by popular culture. The sociologist enumerates the various successive stages which have shaped the British society for a few decades as follows in *Understanding Popular Culture*: 'Popular culture is the culture of the subordinated and disempowered and thus always bears within it signs of power relations, traces of the forces of domination and subordination that are central to our social system and therefore to our social experience.'<sup>2</sup> His study goes further as he highlights the demise of working-class culture which has been superseded by 'proletarian culture'. His analysis of the links between production and sales appear as a mere commercial plot:

Every commodity reproduces the ideology of the system that produced it: a commodity is ideology made material. This ideology works to produce in the subordinate a false consciousness of their position in society, false for two reasons: first because it blinds them to the conflict of interest between the bourgeoisie and proletariat (they may well be aware of the difference, but will understand this difference as contributing to a final social consensus, a liberal pluralism in which social differences are seen finally as harmonious, not as conflictual), and second because it blinds them to their common interests with their fellow workers – it prevents the development of a sense of class solidarity or class consciousness.<sup>3</sup>

The scathing criticism voiced by the Australian researcher is nonetheless assuaged by the dynamism he attributes to the popular consumers of culture. This forcefulness enables the

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780- 1950*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1958, p 327

<sup>2</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, pp. 4 & 5

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 14

appropriation of the entities and their distortion by the members of the working-class. He vents his optimistic outlook as he states that ‘culture is a living, active process: it can be developed only from within, it cannot be imposed from without or above’.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines’s faith in culture as a means of social betterment is illustrated by his collaboration with Ken Loach. The last part of my study includes his endeavour to vulgarize his political message through different devices such as films and television series. His commitment remains unchanged as he targets a wider audience. Class is still the main issue with its corollary: geographic, human and social entrapment. His wilful oversight of the parameters listed by Dennis Dworkin’s in *Class Struggles*: ‘gender, race, colonialism / postcolonialism, and nationality / nationalism,’<sup>2</sup> contributes to the impression of nostalgia which pervades the narratives. The description of an enduring British working-class identity in the face of successive economic and social upheavals betrays the protagonists’ entrapment and inability to cope. The geographical, social and human entrapment is accentuated by the writer’s use of realistic data which verge on naturalism as ‘that unnecessarily faithful portrayal of offensive incidents’<sup>3</sup> according to Raymond Williams’s definition in *The Long Revolution*. Yet, Barry Hines’s literary world is achieved through his use and adaptation of realistic details to create a working-class entity. Raymond Williams appraises this kind of social novel thus: ‘The tenor, here, is not description, but the finding and materialization of a formula about society. A particular pattern is abstracted, from the sum of social experience, and a society is created from this pattern.’<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines recurrently claims that his main motive is political, and it is precisely his goal to trigger the working-class members’ awareness that underlies his whole writings. His representation of the downtrodden differs from the image sketch by Robert Tressell’s in the following excerpt from *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* but the endeavour to enlighten is similar:

Can’t you see that these people, whom you are trying to make understand your plan for the regeneration of the world, your doctrine of universal brotherhood and love are for the most part – intellectually – on level with Hottentots? The only things they feel any real interest in are beer, football, betting and – of course – one other subject. Their highest ambition is to be allowed to Work.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, Pearson, 2007, p. 11

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Columbia University Press, 1961, p. 275

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 280

<sup>5</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, Panther Books, London, 1965, pp 542 & 543

Barry Hines's faith in political action by the working-class for the betterment of their living conditions is voiced in the opening lines of the film *Threads* thus: 'In an urban society everything connects, each person's needs are fed by the skills of many others. Our lives are woven together in a fabric.' The author's belief in the power of the social group underpins his focus on class to the detriment of gender issues and globalisation. It also contributes to a nostalgic outlook which harks on the pivotal eras of the Miners' Strike in 1984 and the 1926 Strike. The juxtaposition and distortion of present and past working-class idiosyncrasies, as the changes are taken into account yet their impact is downplayed, constitute the uniqueness of Barry Hines's literary output and tenor.

## **Chapter one : Geographic Representations.**

This chapter presents the various facets of the geographic background used by Barry Hines in the nine novels of our corpus: *The Blinder*, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, *First Signs*, *The Gamekeeper*, *The Price of Coal*, *Looks and Smiles*, *Unfinished Business*, *The Heart of It* and *Elvis Over England* and the play entitled *Two Men from Derby*. The diachronic focus spans the different complementary components from the largest element to the smallest, yet closest entity, that-is-to-say the region, the town, the district and last but not least the household. The thorough attention to details underlines the importance granted to geographic data in working-class literature. This echoes the point of view conveyed by Alan Sillitoe's statement quoted in the article entitled *Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe's Nottingham Novels* by Stephen Daniels and Simon Rycroft:

Home is like a fortress of an army which prides itself on its mobility ... Departing from the base, feet define geography, the eyes observe and systematize it ... As the base line in surveying is essential for the formation of a map and all points on it, so the connected points of birth, place and upbringing are – for any person, and even more for a writer – factors to be relinquished.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's narratives underscore the specificities of the British working-class geographical environment through the successive changes which have re-shaped it during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The plots focus on the Midlands and Sheffield as the exemplar of British industrial background from the relative affluent mid 1960s until the bleak late 1990s. The societal changes are implied by the concrete changes to the region, the town, the district, and the home. The historical references add veracity to the empirical descriptions. The relentless worsening of the popular habitat is recurrently implied through the thorough attention to trivial details. The implicit criticisms levelled by the writer at the political and economic upheavals echo the committed role of the writer summed up thus: 'artistic consciousness as a creative intervention into the world rather than as a mere reflection of it'<sup>2</sup> by Terry Eagleton in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. The narrator's standpoints undeniably shape his literary output as he explains his objectives in *This Artistic Life* thus: 'Writing is nothing to do with pretty views. It's to do with commitment.'<sup>3</sup> The traditional setting is also summarily delineated as follows: 'Most of the people I write about live in places like this or in

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Daniels and Simon Rycroft; *Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe's Nottingham Novels*, Blackwell, 1993, p. 461

<sup>2</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Routledge, 1976, p. 50

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 3

old terraced houses or on vast council estates.’<sup>1</sup> In spite of the successive alterations to the working-class habitat during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the backdrop remains gloomy. This pervasive bleakness accentuates the impression of entrapment through the insuperable constraints of the diverse geographical parameters which will be analysed in this chapter.

### **1. 1 The region.**

The geographic environment of the nine novels and the play by Barry Hines composing our corpus confines itself to Great Britain during the four last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The plots derive from historical events from that epoch and highlight the physical, human and social evolution of the working-class through the observation of a microcosm in the Midlands. The diachronic delineation underscores the successive changes by focusing on commonplace, even trivial, details. The author’s stress on precise occurrences and his minute portrayal of the geographic background is redolent of the realism advocated by the Hungarian critic, Georg Lukacs. The impact of historical events on the daily lives of Barry Hines’s protagonists corroborates the classic Marxist tenet which states that literature can only be properly understood within the framework of the society that had shaped it. The supposedly artlessly contrived backdrop adds to this true-to-life effect which recalls Engels’s definition of realism expounded in his literary critique of Margaret Harkness’s *A City Girl* in 1888. The comment reads thus: ‘Realism to my mind implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances.’ These classical situations shape the writer’s humanist message through his empathy for the social group he describes. Besides, Barry Hines’s working-class roots endow his literary works with the accuracy of a first-hand testimony. The uniqueness of this position recalls Raymond Williams’s definition of realism in his critique *The Long Revolution*, published in 1961, and eloquently subtitled: *An Analysis of the Democratic, Industrial, and Cultural Changes Transforming Our Society*. The accent is laid on the primacy of the writer’s operative interpretation:

We know now that we literally create the world we see, and that this human creation – a discovery of how we can live in the material world we inhabit – is necessarily dynamic and active; the old static realism of the passive observer is merely a hardened convention.<sup>2</sup>

The writer’s part is thus made obvious and Barry Hines’s literary technique highlights his personal and political commitment. The tenor of the message is actually honed throughout the successive economic and political upheavals from the mid 1960s till the late 1990s. The

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Columbia University Press / New York, 1961, p. 288

stress is recurrently laid on the foremost role played by the geographical background on the outlook of the working-class members. This creed echoes the statement voiced by Richard Peet in the article entitled *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory*: ‘An individual’s class position is inherited from his parents via the quality of the social and economic institutional environment into which he is born, or within which he lives for the first years of his life.’<sup>1</sup> The primary importance of the geographical roots and background is enhanced by the confined setting as very few of Barry Hines’s protagonists move away from their native Midlands.

Barry Hines’s literary treatment of trips abroad is redolent of the *Bildungsroman* tradition. The awareness gained by the up-rooted protagonists is rendered through the journey to Italy undertaken by Tom Renshaw, in *First Signs* and through Karl’s Rickards’ moving to France in *The Heart of It*. The few descriptions of foreign locations serve as a foil to the dismal urban landscape of the British settings. The departures and the returns of the travellers enable the presentation of the changes in the popular habitat in Britain during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Joining the army constitutes the stereotyped way of leaving one’s working-class environment throughout British literature. The relations of the fighting abroad illustrate the growing awareness of the exiles. This is the literary device used in *Elvis Over England*, as a former soldier remembers bitterly his stint in Burma during the Second World. Although the conflict is specifically dated, chronologically and geographically limited, it is given a symbolic value. This exemplar status goes hand in hand with the emblematic figure of Jack who stands out as a typical worker: ‘I’m writing this sitting by the camp fire. Just had our suppers – K rations as usual which just about keeps you going. How I long for a good Sunday dinner – roast beef and Yorkshire pud.’<sup>2</sup> The disillusioned awareness of the working-class conscript reads thus:

The army’s the university of the working class’. (...). ‘Gives you a broader perspective of life, and brings you into direct contact with the ruling class, the officers. And what a shower of shit they were, most of ’em. If they’d had gunpowder for brains, they wouldn’t have had enough to blow their hats off.’<sup>3</sup>

This protagonist’s rancour echoes Arthur Seaton’s in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe, ‘In the army it was: ‘F\_\_\_\_\_ you, Jack, I’m all right.’ Out of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Peet, *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory* from *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1975), pp 564-571

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p.109

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 108



the army it was: 'Every man for himself.' It amounted to the same thing.'<sup>1</sup> The similar viewpoints highlight the army's failure to act as a social melting-pot.

Yet, joining the army remains a means to escape from the chronic unemployment amongst the working-class is presented as a solution in *Looks and Smiles*. The alluring presentation relies on stereotypes expressed in the following conversation between the two school-leavers: 'I know, but it still sounded all right. Especially all that travelling. He said they went to Germany and Norway and France ...'<sup>2</sup> Alan, one of the teenagers, does join the army in the end. Thus he stands out as the only character entitled to speak about Northern Ireland where he is fighting as a soldier. His testimony about this area and its inhabitants underlines his contempt and his hatred. This verbal violence spitting out racist commonplaces stands in stark contrast with the traditional more tolerant depictions and viewpoints expressed by Barry Hines's characters. The following excerpt from *Looks and Smiles* illustrates the scathing criticism vented by the young conscript:

Bloody Catholics. With some families that you know are IRA sympathizers, you just keep going back time after time. Middle of the night. Anytime. You just give 'em hell. And the stink in some of the houses!' He wrinkled his nose, and had a drink of beer as if he could still smell it. 'Kids pissing the bed, the lot.'<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines's latest novel, *Elvis Over England*, is just as scathing a criticism as any of his previous writings in spite of an utterly different treatment of the geographical backdrop. Folkloric clichés set up a ludicrous image of Scotland in *Elvis Over England*, which relates Eddie's to hilarious tribulations. This pastiche of a picaresque novel stages an unexpected hero: a fifty-year-old rocker in desperate search for his youth and missed opportunities through his peregrinations at the wheel of his pink Cadillac, the exact copy of his idol's: Elvis Presley. It is Eddie who serves as our guide and his sweeping presentation is on a par with his truculent spontaneity as he delves into his pseudo-historical knowledge. He spurts out commonplaces from British popular culture. Here is the burlesque summary of the History of Scotland limited to the episode of the usurpation of the land by the English; 'We were driven from our rightful land by the English way back in the eighteenth century. He knew about this episode in Scottish history from watching the film *Bonnie Prince Charlie*.'<sup>4</sup> This outlandish description echoes the caricature of the Scots through their typical accent which Eddie keeps mocking: 'Eddie guessed that he was talking about his car, but the accent plus the word before

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1975, p. 136

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 35

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.197

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 115

‘eyes’, left him in some difficulty. Polish Jack who worked on the bins at home spoke clearer English than this bloke.’<sup>1</sup> Any stereotype and any hackneyed joke are permitted as the loud and colourful hero of *Elvis Over England* jokes to his heart’s content:

He ordered the Pie of the Day with chips. He had expected to see something Scottish on the menu like haggis or cock-a-leekie soup but it was no different to the menu at the Greyhound, except that they didn’t serve Yorkshire pudding with gravy.<sup>2</sup>

The story is studded by several puns and plays-on-words. This stylistic characteristic gives the narration a feigned lightness which contrasts starkly with the deep-rooted despair felt by the hero. The protagonist’s humour stems entirely from the discrepancy between reality and the fantastic situations he conjures up at will, ‘Eddie thought of his own noisy neighbour, then imagined a kilted Jock battering the wall down with a caber.’<sup>3</sup> Local recipes, traditional costume and typical Scottish games caricature concisely the specificity of the area. The evocation builds up thanks to snatches and slight allusions, and it relies on common knowledge based on British popular imagery. His idealistic description of the Scottish landscape translates the character’s powerlessness to come to terms with the present as he clings to a nostalgic outlook through clichés:

Although this room was similar to his childhood room, the view was entirely different. His window at home looked out across grey roofs and smoking chimneys, while this one framed a view of high hills and grazing sheep, with not a house in sight.<sup>4</sup>

The protagonist’s exotic depiction of Scotland echoes the recurrent allusions to typically popular holiday resorts whose names have grown synonymous with holidays. Blackpool embodies the notion of holidaymaking in popular imagery as the numerous allusions to this seaside resort testify in the four novels of our study. In *The Price of Coal*, the miners refer to the famous tower in this town as they mock the scope of the works undertaken at the mine for Prince Charles’s impending visit: ‘Somebody said it was the same firm that paints Blackpool Tower.’<sup>5</sup> In the second part of the same narration the town of Blackpool as a synonym of holidays by the sea is mentioned again by the rescuing team down the mine: ‘Bloody hell; it’s colder than the sea at Blackpool’ ‘Watch that jellyfish, George. Don’t let it get behind your kneepads.’<sup>6</sup> The tone is sombre after the accident down the mine and

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp 167 & 168

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p 168

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 186

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 167

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 20

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 121

this light-hearted joke relaxes the atmosphere by appealing to a familiar commonplace. Blackpool is also mentioned as the place where Karen, the young heroine of *Looks and Smiles*, has just spent her last holidays as she reflects: 'Where did you go, abroad somewhere?' 'No, I went to Blackpool with Susan. They said it was one of the hottest weeks they'd ever had.'<sup>1</sup> Throughout Barry Hines's narrations Blackpool remains the favourite holiday resort for the members of the British working-class as the following quotation from *Elvis Over England* reveals: 'Eddie was transported back to the Hall of Mirrors in the pleasure beach at Blackpool and planning to push Jack off the Big Dipper.'<sup>2</sup>

Scarborough, on the east coast of England, stands out as another favourite seaside resort for the working-class members from the Midlands. During a conversation with his English teacher Billy Casper, in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, recalls his holidays in this town. The sole reference suffices to draw up a holiday scene based on common implicit notions to the different protagonists: 'An' there's gulls an' all. I used to watch 'em for hours when we used to go away. It wa' t'best at Scarborough, where we could get on t'cliff top an' watch 'em.'<sup>3</sup> In *Elvis Over England*, this town also stands out as the paragon of seaside resorts as the hero nostalgically remembers: 'Danny riding a donkey in his cowboy outfit on the beach at Scarborough...'<sup>4</sup> A sole allusion suffices to conjure up happy memories. These stereotyped images underline the geographical limits of the protagonists' environment.

On a par with these classical portrayals of British seaside resorts Barry Hines uses the north – south dichotomy recurrent in British working-class literature. The outlined geographical and historical backdrop easily lends itself to this generalisation. This simplistic scission is recurrently alluded to, for example thus in *Fist Signs* published in 1972:

It was all there, the bumpkin's monotone, the hammered vowels, the brusque enunciation of each syllable. Was it Albert Modley up there amongst the girders, whippet in one hand, cup final ticket in the other? (...) He smiled. He was home.<sup>5</sup>

The so-called splitting of the country is rendered through the blunt generalisations bandied by the hero of *The Gamekeeper* published in 1974: 'They don't know they're born down there. Life's that bloody slow they're all walking about backwards.'<sup>6</sup> The cliché

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p.161

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 69

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 118

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 31

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 88

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 207

continues in a humorous vein: 'They don't know what strike means down Wiltshire. They think it's summat that only happens to matches.'<sup>1</sup>

The south of England, and especially London, keep a promising and enticing aura, as Karen in *Looks and Smiles* candidly asserts when she enthuses over the prospect of settling down in Bristol where her father lives, 'It'll be great. It (Bristol)'s near London, you know. I'll be able to go some weekends, shopping.'<sup>2</sup> The teenager's ignorance does not quell her excitement as she is allured by the potential opportunities in the capital city. The warning which Mick reads in the work agency stresses the fallacious enticement exerted on young unemployed, 'He looked round the room and read the posters on the walls; one advertised a club for the unemployed youth in the city, the other advised against going to London without a job.'<sup>3</sup>

During the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the simplistic partition still applies as the hero of *Elvis Over England* states: 'She'll be blubbing to Ralph now, back in Burton.' - 'Bedford'<sup>4</sup> The fact that Eddie mistakes the names reveals his mistrust towards the southern part of England which is supposedly economically thriving. Researchers assess that rift between the south and the north of England has become more and more acute, during the era spanned by the novels of our corpus, because of rampant unemployment due to the recent de-industrialization. The sociologist Owen Jones bemoans the gaping schism between the two regions and censures the prejudices in *Chavs*, subtitled *The Demonization of the Working Class*, published in 2011. This study analyses the stigmatization of the working-class which has arisen because of rampant unemployment. According to the researcher's findings the current economic recession has even exacerbated the geographic and social chasm: 'It is "up North", it is a bleak mix of pebbledash council blocks and neglected wasteland, and it is populated by some people able of confirming the worst stereotype and prejudice of the white underclass.'<sup>5</sup>

The impact of the successive economic changes on the geographical setting is vividly underlined in the novels of our corpus. Yet, the actual place where the events take place does not matter as the scenario could be applied to any British industrial area. The subsequent uniformity of the backdrop underlines the physical, material and geographical limits which partition the daily lives of Barry Hines's heroes. The drabness and anonymity of the

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 208

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 170

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 15

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 32

<sup>5</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 16

background endows the writer's message with a universality which transcends the physical limits of the north of England on the one hand, and the physical limits of the Midlands on the other. The author's literary treatment glosses over the local idiosyncrasies. Moreover the feelings vented by Barry Hines's protagonists contrast starkly with the loathing for his native town vented by Frank Dawley, the hero of *The Death of William Posters* by Alan Sillitoe. The exile worker claims his disdain for Nottingham: 'The place where he had been born, bred and spiritually nullified.'<sup>1</sup> On the other hand the aloofness expressed by Barry Hines's characters vividly clashes with William Woodruff's fond memories of his native area in his heartfelt tribute to Lancashire and Blackburn in his autobiography entitled *The Road to Nab End*: 'I was proud to be a Lancastrian, especially to be a Blackburnian. Blackburn was not just another Lancashire town; Blackburn had been the greatest weaving centre in the world.'<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines highlights the upheavals caused by the deindustrialisation of Great Britain and underscores the resulting deterioration of the neighbourhood. The noxious effects apply everywhere in the urban conurbations as the following excerpt in *Looks and Smiles* reveals. Mick Walsh and his girlfriend, Karen, leave Sheffield to visit the young girl's father in Bristol. It is certainly no pleasure or discovery trip, and the description of the journey by motorbike of the two protagonists reads thus:

They travelled on the motorways. This is what they passed:

Squashed birds. A smoking van on the hard shoulder. Police cars lurking in lay-bys. A derelict coal-mine. Slag heaps. A deserted village. Dead elm trees. Tractors grubbing up hedgerows. Broiler houses. Strips of lorry tyres like cast off snakeskins. JESUS LIVES scrawled on a bridge. New housing estates in the wilds. Long vehicles. A coachload of senior citizens on a mystery tour. A vintage car. Company cars. Cars with leopard skin seat covers. Cars with dogs nodding and hands waving in their windows. A motel. A two-mile tail-back going the other way. A GET-IN-LANE-NOW sign. Major roadworks for mile after mile. A crash surrounded by police cars and ambulances with flashing blue lights. An abandoned dog running fearfully and exhausted along the central reservation. A rusty mudguard. A buckled crash barrier. A burnt out car down an embankment. Broken windscreen glass. Blood on the road. A kestrel hovering over a scorched bank. A slimy canal. New trading estates with FACTORY UNITS TO LET signs. Silent factories. Empty council houses. Overgrown allotments. A stinking river. Acres of new, unsold cars. A busy golf course. Scrapyards. A flock of gulls on a rubbish-tip. Polythene flapping on a barbed wire fence. Litter: in fields, in woods, in streets. A convoy of army trucks.<sup>3</sup>

The previous depiction is reminiscent of an inventory; yet it is utterly devoid of any touch of exoticism whatsoever. The crude heterogeneous enumeration highlights the drabness

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *The Death of William Posters*, Pan Books Ltd., London, 1965, p. 474

<sup>2</sup> William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End*, Abacus, London, 2002, p. 406

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp.168 & 169.

of the environment crossed by the travellers. The realistic description shows the succeeding heterogeneous items through a glut of down-to-earth examples. Urban and rural characteristics stand side by side in a random confusion. Affluence borders on economic recession, and modernity borders on old-fashioned notions. The images succeed in accordance with the rhythm of the vehicle and seem to gather in themes and anaphora. The thought associates, dissociates, compares and contrasts at will and at random. An impression rebounds, recalls another notion or averts another one following random and ludicrous sets of associations. The realistic items are chosen to highlight the drab background without any further comment, and this latent criticism stamps Barry Hines's message.

The dreariness of the urban sceneries with the added factor of the deterioration of the geographical background in Barry Hines's novels are on a par with Stephen Foster's account in *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, published in 2009. The following extract summarises the succeeding recent historical events:

My outlook was shaped by coming of age in this climate, in a time and a place that consisted of the fraught years immediately prior to the transition: the death of manufacturing industry and the birth of service.uk, the world of today, the land of off-shore call centres and Chinese illegal drowning in the Morecambe Bay. To make way for this improvement, the traditional working classes had to be phased out. We might win the odd battle, but we were certainly losing the war. Every week there were more lay-offs and more redundancies as the condition of mass unemployment that the Tories had deliberately created – as part of their campaign of hatred against us – began to bite.<sup>1</sup>

The situation summed up in the previous excerpt echoes Barry Hines's passage from *Looks and Smiles* published in 1981. This constitutes the unique reference to the European Union in the novels of our corpus. It vents the hero's concern about the soaring unemployment figures and it lampoons the EEC, which he accuses of all wrongs:

And a few extremists said that all this was inevitable, especially now that we were in the Common Market; and that the industry was being deliberately run down. There would soon be no heavy industry left in the country, they said, and England would be used as a finishing shop and a warehouse for goods produced elsewhere.<sup>2</sup>

The geographical setting of Barry Hines's protagonists is centered on Britain, and especially on the Midlands. The scarce references to foreign countries highlight the geographical limitations of the experiences. The exotic delineation of Scotland relies entirely on commonplaces and hackneyed humoristic situations. The everyday geographical

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p 20

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 38

environment is sketched by resorting to general data which can apply to any English contemporary town. This literary treatment highlights the widespread defacement of the urban sceneries by the economic and historical upheavals during the last decades of the 20th century. The geographical confinements underscore the parochialism of the cast of working-class characters. The national and regional boundaries underpin the notion of imprisonment which is heightened by the bounds of the city. This is the issue of the next part of my analysis.

## **1. 2. The town: the urban stereotypes.**

Barry Hines draws a typical urban setting as the backdrop of the novels of our corpus. The choice of his native town by the writer seems implicit through the urban descriptions which punctuate the narrations. Yet the actual name of Sheffield is seldom mentioned and it is this apparent oversight that endows the descriptions with a universal message. In *Two Men from Derby* the native town sets the geographical limits of the working-class members as the detailed itinerary is traced by the football recruiters: ‘You walk it to Hoyland. Then you catch a bus to Sheffield Lane Top. From there you catch a tram to the station. Then you catch a train to Derby.’<sup>1</sup> The candid repartee from the startled heroin corroborates the impression of despair and imprisonment in keeping with the historical backdrop of 1930: ‘Never been! I’ve only been to Sheffield twice and that was to see my mother in hospital.’<sup>2</sup> In fact, even though Sheffield is actually mentioned in the very first lines of *The Price of Coal*, it is nevertheless merged in a group of towns in the Midlands. The mining town is merely one of the various places which Prince Charles is about to visit: ‘Well, as some of you may already know, at the end of next month Prince Charles is making a two-day visit to this area. He’ll be visiting Sheffield, Doncaster and one or two other places in the district.’<sup>3</sup> The specificity of Sheffield as a typical example of a mining city in the centre of England is established in the same novel by the precise evocation of mines through the names of ‘Milton Colliery’, of ‘Wentworth Pit’ and of ‘15’s Maingate’. These accurate appellations refer to the mine, the pit and the vein where the Prince’s visit takes place, then where the deadly accident happens a few weeks later, and serve as samples. This so-called specificity seems nonetheless somewhat undermined by the use of names which could apply to any British area and therefore embody geographic generalisation.

Sheffield serves as the background thanks to a few concrete references. ‘Chatsworth

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Two Men from Derby*, Hutchinson of London, 1979, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 23

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.7

Street' is mentioned in the novel entitled *Looks and Smiles* by Mick Walsh who places it just next to the town-hall. The name borrowed from a famous Derbyshire castle seems to testify that Sheffield is really the background of Barry Hines's novels. Yet this may not be the case since several towns in the Midlands have streets under the same name. The plan of Sheffield is summarily drawn through the use of street-names such as 'Bevan Avenue', 'Byron Avenue', 'George Street', 'King Street', 'Market Street', 'High Street', 'Cobden Street' or 'Byron Street'. The previous names crop up time and time again in the four novels of our study and criss-cross the different districts. These stock names conjure up a geographic backdrop which could be traced in any British working-class town. A similar haziness applies to the depiction of the districts in the suburbs. In the novel, *A Kes for a Knave*, Billy Casper mentions 'Valley Estate' as his address, and quotes 'Monastory Farm', that is to say the farm where he has found his kestrel. The young boy's precise itinerary while delivering newspapers follows roads with such names as 'City Road', 'Firs Hill', or still 'Field Crescent'. Even though the whole range of expressions reveals the geographic location and the characteristics of the mentioned places this list could apply to any urban conurbation throughout Great Britain. The firm 'Uttley and Parsons' is mentioned in *Looks and Smiles*, but once again, it is a stock name. In the same narration Mick and Alan give the district of 'Ringwood' as their address, yet another standard name which could be found anywhere in the British Isles. Last but not least pubs are plentiful in the four novels and the range of their names spreads from 'The White Horse', to 'The White Hart', to 'The Black Swan' or still to 'The Greyhound', Eddie's favourite pub in *Elvis Over England*. This repertoire gathers countless similar places scattered the length and breadth of the country and bestows a symbolic value to the household names. This literary treatment contrasts with Alan Sillitoe's precise mapping of Nottingham as the highly-detailed itinerary, of what seems to be a British pastime, shows. This is the route followed by Arthur Seaton and his friends on their Christmas Eve pub-crawl in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The whole enumeration of the pub names complies with the realistic rendition of the urban scenery as follows:

They crossed Slab Square and, fresh from a pint in the Plumtree rolled to the Red Dragon and from there pushed into the Skittling Alley and the Coach Tavern and finally elbowed through the squash of people packing the Trip to Jerusalem, a limpet of lights and noise fastened on to the carcass of the Castle Rock.<sup>1</sup>

The primacy bestowed on Sheffield is undeniable in *A Kestrel for a Knave* and *The Price of Coal*, published respectively in 1968 and 1979, because of the use of the

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1958, p. 199



characteristic accent from this mining city. Here are a few examples from *A Kestrel for a Knave*: ‘Tha’d better get up’<sup>1</sup>, or ‘tha knows’<sup>2</sup>, or ‘Gi’o’ver.’<sup>3</sup> The same care is taken for the phonetic transcription of the miners’ vernacular language in *The Price of Coal*: ‘I’m having nowt to do with it’<sup>4</sup> and ‘I’ve heard that an’ all.’<sup>5</sup> This literary method is no longer used in the subsequent writings and this change may mean the loss of this oral specificity within the British working-class.

Barry Hines’s urban descriptions gloss over the specific features of Sheffield to stress the uniformity of the British industrial towns. The part of the implicit supersedes the need for precise topography. The connivance stems from the influence of former working-class novels which have paved the way. The tacit references are reminiscent of depictions like that of Coketown in *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens, published in 1854: ‘It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage.’<sup>6</sup> The mere depiction conveys the writer’s forceful criticism of the hardships endured by the inhabitants. The industrial past of Sheffield is also depicted as follows in *English Journey* by J.B. Priestley, which recounts the writer’s journey through England in 1933: ‘We ran under the murky canopy and were in Sheffield. The smoke was so thick that it made a foggy twilight in the descending streets, which appeared as if they would end in the steaming bowels of the earth.’<sup>7</sup> Through such depictions Sheffield has become synonymous with its industrial past. The implicit reference to Sheffield, even though the name of the town is not mentioned, crops up in a tirade by Eddie in *Elvis Over England*. The city stands out as the symbolic flagship of the former British steel industry:

And all the nicks and burns from flying sparks I used to get. I didn’t care though, it was part and parcel of the job. That’s what you get working with molten steel.’ (...) ‘We made the finest steel in the world. It made me feel proud when I saw all the countries that we used to export to: Japan, USA, Germany. We were giants then and I was part of it.’<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p 7

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 7

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 8

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.9

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 14

<sup>6</sup> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, Penguin, 1994, p 19

<sup>7</sup> J.B. Priestley, *English Journey*, Mandarin, London, 1994, p.154

<sup>8</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp. 59 & 60

In the earlier novels of our corpus Barry Hines outlines the proximity of the town with the working-class housing estates. This characteristic is blatant in the following description from *Fist Signs*:

And, then topping the long hill which marked the City boundary, there it was laid out before him, his country. Mile upon mile of woodland, meadow and crop, undulating and folding in on itself as it rose and merged into the moors, which formed the horizon in the far distance. Slotted about this pastoral landscape, as if to forestall any suggestion of prettiness, were villages with their attendant mines and muck-stacks. Each unit stood as compact as the property on a monopoly square and the lack of any development between them left the overall scene essentially rural.<sup>1</sup>

A similar landscape unrolls in *A Kestrel for a Knave* as the itinerary of Billy Casper's paper round explores the typical surroundings of a mining town:

A lane cut across the top of Firs Hill, forming a T-junction. Bill turned left along it. There was no pavement, and whenever a car approached he either crossed the lane or stepped into the long grass at the side and waited for it to pass. Fields, and a few hedgerow trees sloped down into the valley. Toy traffic travelled along the City Road, and across the road, in the valley bottom, was the sprawl of the estate. Towards the city, a pit chimney and the pit-head winding gear showed above the rooftops, and at the back of the estate was a patchwork of fields, black, and grey, and pale winter green; giving way to a wood, which stood out on the far slope as clear as an ink blot.<sup>2</sup>

In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, as the plan of the grid of roads around the popular districts is drawn in accordance with a standard topography. The endless rows of traditional houses of red bricks echo the stereotypes typical of the British towns. Barry Hines hones the realistic rendition of the geographic environment through his attention to the slightest detail: 'On both sides of this road, and the next, and along all the Roads, Streets, Avenues, Lanes and Crescents of the estate, the houses were of the same design: semi-detached, one block, four front windows to a block, and a central chimney stack.'<sup>3</sup> Over a decade later, the scenery remains unchanged in *The Price of Coal* as the miners' walk to the colliery reads thus:

They left the village and walked across the fields towards the pit. The path divided fields of oats and barley, then led, less clearly, across a football pitch, where two ponies kept the grass short during the close season. They came out into a lane close to the pit.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 89

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p 14

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 153

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.17

Barry Hines's thrifty use of allusions contrasts starkly with the plethora of geographical and historical details provided by Philip Hensher throughout his tribute to the town's industrial past in *The Northern Clemency*:

There it was: Sheffield, 1974. Francis saw the artificial black hills, the slag heaps piled up by the side of the motorway. But there were seven red hills in Sheffield too. The city was founded on them. The six rivers, too, the black-running Don, the Sheaf, naming the city, the Porter, the Rivelin, the Meersbrook, the Loxley. Each had its valley, some green and lovely, some lined with grimy warehouses, but all ran together, and they were the reason for the city.<sup>1</sup>

The recurrent image of the urban district verging on the rural countryside in Barry Hines's early novels no longer applies in the subsequent narrations of our study. This former specific feature of the working-class geographical setting is reminiscent of Alan Sillitoe's writing which is typified as follow in the article, *Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe's Nottingham Novels* by Stephen Daniels and Simon Rycroft: 'Arthur Seaton's world is a labyrinthine zone, recurrently described as a "jungle" or "maze". Arthur prowls the backstreets of the city, or the footpaths of the adjacent country, part guerrilla, part predatory beast 'caught in a game of fang-and-claw'.<sup>2</sup>

The dreary monotonous urban landscape dating back to the industrialisation of Great Britain is used as the omnipresent background of Barry Hines's writings. This partitioning of the urban space is scathingly criticised by Grant H. Kester in the article entitled *Out of Sight Is out of Mind: The Imaginary Space of Postindustrial Culture* published in 1993. The following extract sums up the bourgeoisie's scheme to separate the different classes geographically thus:

They also worked to limit and regulate their spatial and visual proximity to the working class with the industrial city. This regulation involved the construction of literal barriers between themselves and the working class – most often as a component of urban development projects such as subway or rail construction, the siting of retail and residential districts, and the creation of boulevards and public spaces.<sup>3</sup>

The so-called working-class solidarity is recurrently attributed to the set geographical chart of British urban conurbations. Therefore sociologists blame the access to property for the re-modeling of the classes in England. Barry Hines overlooks this social and urban

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<sup>1</sup> Philip Hensher, *The Northern Clemency*, Fourth Estate, London, 2008, pp. 51&52

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Daniels and Simon Rycroft; *Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe's Nottingham Novels*, Blackwell, 1993, p. 472

<sup>3</sup> Grant H. Kester, *Out of Sight Is out of Mind: The Imaginary Space of Postindustrial Culture*, *Social Text*, No 35 (Summer, 1993), pp. 72-92

upheaval and propounds an unchanging united microcosm. Yet in spite of this negation he draws the gradual changes to the background minutely in his recent portrayals. The comments voiced by the hero of *First Signs* outline the evolution of his native town during his absence:

The city had changed, it was smarter, cleaner, whole black Victorian blocks had been demolished and replaced by steel and glass towers. There were streets he had never heard of, prospects he would have found unrecognisable if he had seen them on a postcard. There were green spaces with saplings and flowers and seats. Yet enough of the old City remained to let him know where he was; the steel mills banked up the sides of the valley in the distance, the Corn Exchange, as four square and firm as a bulldog, its freshly cleaned stone glowing pink in the afternoon sun, and the Salvation Army band playing to itself at the bottom of the Town Hall steps.<sup>1</sup>

The successive changes to the habitat are recurrently alluded to in Barry Hines's novels with the same attention to detail as the following excerpt from *Unfinished Business* illustrates: 'When Phil saw that all the houses in Morley Street had been knocked down, he turned off the main road and drove slowly between the piles of rubble.'<sup>2</sup> The new working-class community is delineated by the layout of the new estates. The housing-estate where the young protagonists live is characteristic of this urban encroachment:

There wasn't much to know about Hartford anyway; it was just a small village surrounded by modern housing estates. But it had seemed like paradise when they first moved there; so clean and fresh after the city back-street where they had lived before. Their house was right on the edge of the countryside and they could see fields and woods from the kitchen window. Now they had to go upstairs and look across the roofs of newer houses in order to see any open land.<sup>3</sup>

The novels of our study retrace the historical evolution of the working-class habitat throughout the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The geographical modifications are concomitant with the re-structuring of the contemporary British working-class around new attitudes to consumption. These changes are outlined in the background of Barry Hines's recent novels. The attention to realistic details is rendered by the references to the new shops and firms characterised by their new names with phonetic resonance. Looks and Smiles teems with new-fangled names such as the music shop called 'Records Records', the bakery named 'Betta Maid Cakes and Pies' and the launderette 'Coin-Op Launderama'. A similar process applies in *Elvis Over England* for 'The Tiger Tattoo Parlour' and an Indian restaurant which sports the excepted name of 'The Price of Bombay'. The local toponymy draws profusely from names which can apply to any British town whatsoever. The specificity of Sheffield is

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 88

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 5

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 51

erased and its characteristics blend in a diffuse uniformity. This Midlands city is thus bestowed with a symbolic value.

Within the changes which have transformed the British urban scenery during the last decades of the 20th century, Barry Hines especially highlights the early 1980s through de-industrialisation and rampant unemployment. The stress is laid on the drastic political measures taken by Margaret Thatcher which amounted to numerous cutbacks, a word which sounds like a leitmotif throughout the chronicle. The accurate portrayal of the decaying geographical backdrop voices the author's bitter criticism and political message as in the following narrative from *Looks and Smiles*:

They crossed the road, then walked round the corner into Chatsworth Street which the Council had begun to convert into a pedestrian precinct. The architects' drawings on display in the window of the Halifax Building Society showed what it would look like when it was finished; with shoppers resting on benches in the shade of mature trees, raised beds of flowers and shrubs, and families strolling across the paving stones in the direction of W.H. Smith, British Home Stores and Freeman Hardy and Willis.

But work had only just started when further cuts in public expenditure had forced the Council to suspend the scheme. The tarmac had been drilled off and some holes dug, but the pavements and roadway were still at different levels and it still looked like a street. Traffic had been banned from the street though, and people could stroll across the broken ground if they wanted to, or rest on the heaps of sticky clay.<sup>1</sup>

The whole urban surroundings are affected by de-industrialisation and the advent of tertiary services. Nostalgia and transience pervade the backdrop symbolised by flimsy data trying to supersede the old-fashioned heavy industry:

They then caught a bus out to the Ring Road where a Trading Estate was being developed to attract new industries to the city. An old slag heap had been levelled off and enclosed by a wire fence. It was now called Park Lands Industrial Estate. Most of the site was still unoccupied, and the window-less tin factories that had been built looked temporary and insubstantial, as if they could be removed overnight leaving nothing but a concrete floor to greet the work force next morning. Even their names seemed impermanent: Styro, Eno Fabrication, P.I. Products.<sup>2</sup>

The juxtaposition of new names striving to outdo the household brands amounts to the social changes. The writer's apparent naivety seems steeped in the past and to address an enduring working-class identity threatened by outside economic factors:

Most of the steel industry had been nationalized in 1967, but a few small firms had been allowed to remain under private ownership. These, although they had since been taken over by multi-national corporations, still retained the names of their original owners: BARLOW, STAINROD, MUMFORD WRAGG, printed in massive capitals

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 27

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 29

on their factory roofs and walls expressing their pride and confidence of their Victorian creators.

But none of the firms that Mick and Alan visited, either nationalized or privately owned, wanted any more apprentices. Despite the permanence of their premises and their established reputations, they were no more certain of their future than the ephemeral firms on the Trading Estate. They had taken a few apprentices but fewer than last year. The forecasts were poor. They were cutting back. There were rumours of plants closing down and mass redundancies.<sup>1</sup>

The demise of the traditional working-class is also encapsulated by the disappearance of the old shops in *Looks and Smiles*, but Barry Hines limits this concept to the material and physical factors as follows:

The shop had recently been modernized. All the dividing walls had been knocked down and the window space was now part of the shop. A new plate-glass window and door had been fitted, and the garish paintwork and vaguely oriental lettering of the name-board stood out in crude contrast to the weathered brick façade and symmetrical, finely proportioned windows on the second and third floors.

Between the upper windows of a similar building opposite the name and trade of an earlier owner had been painted on the wall. Years of sun and rain had faded the letters badly and the brickwork was ingrained with soot. But the sign still remained legible under the grime; faint yet clear, like writing on a blackboard that had not been properly rubbed off.

The sign read: GEORGE HARDY AND SON, GROCER AND GENERAL DEALER. The shop window was now called Disco Discounts.<sup>2</sup>

The realism of Barry Hines's depictions is corroborated by Beatrix Campbell's account of her journey through Britain in the early 1980s following the itinerary of George Orwell almost fifty years later. This harrowing record of what the writer witnessed was first published in 1984 and won the Cheltenham Festival Prize for Literature. The choice of the title: *Wigan Pier Revisited* and of the subtitle: *Poverty and Politics in the 80s* explicitly underlines its purpose:

And now government-grant-aided industrial units are being built as the centres of our old industrial universe are being laid to waste. They are a stark contrast to the derelict steelyards of Sheffield, where there's nothing left by acres of scrap lying on flattened ground, or the old factories, which look either like the work-house or satanic hangars: It still shocks you to see them – that's where they put the people to work. If George Orwell were to return to Sheffield today he'd see the metamorphosis from spacious if spartan semi-detached suburbias to dense tower blocks.<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines's novels appear steeped in this era geographically and historically. The accent is laid on the material stereotypes to the detriment of the subsequent changes. A feeling

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp. 29 & 30

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 45 & 46

<sup>3</sup> Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited. Poverty and Politics in the 80s*, Virago, 1984, p. 34

of nostalgia pervades the whole outlook. It is all the more acute because of widespread unemployment and it obscures the background of *Elvis Over England*, as Eddie rues the past, 'as he drove along the dual carriageway, past acres of reclaimed land, where sports centres and shopping malls replaced the steelworks he had worked in for twenty-five years, before being made redundant.'<sup>1</sup> The same characteristics apply to the whole of Britain as he reflects, 'He passed through a former mining village where the working men's Club had been converted into a Heritage Centre and the muck stack contoured into a ski slope.'<sup>2</sup> The chronicle of the foregone demise of the heavy industry and coal mines is rendered by Philip Hensher in *The Northern Clemency* as follows: 'The charcoal buildings, the meccano towers and conveyor belts had a temporary air, like the great heaps of slag all about; even the sign at the entrance and the gates were cheap and temporary, like the signs on building sites.'<sup>3</sup> This analysis foreshadows the undermining of the identity of the working-class through the upheaval of the environment. Even though both writers use the same realistic backgrounds Barry Hines refutes the foregone demise of the popular group and underlines the everlasting substratum which binds the members.

Michael Collins retraces the relentless evolution of the geographic setting in the sociological study entitled *The Likes Of Us*, subtitled *A Biography of the White Working Class*. Published in 2004 and winner of the Orwell Prize for political pamphlets, this work strives to draw up a definition of the new British popular class. The statement examines the primordial part played by the recent evolution of the urban topography. The following extract teems with household names and underlines the successive changes which create an impression of permanent flux, synonym of the loss of traditional landmarks:

Here, the obligatory McDonald's, Asda, Woolworths remain, and kebab shops and those outlets that are a dry cleaner's one day, video rentals the next, and finally an everything-for-a-pound-shop before the hardboard goes up and bill posters bury them, are slowly disappearing. TK Maxx has arrived with cut-price designer gear. There's a multiplex, a massive bingo hall, Pizza Express, and increasingly, pubs and more pubs, where stocky men check for fake IK, and confide in headsets as though preparing for trouble or royalty.<sup>4</sup>

The plethora of brand names points to the uniformity of consumer goods throughout Great Britain. This recent trait is deliberately overlooked by Barry Hines whose outline remains steeped in traditional working-class habits. The nostalgic outlook contrasts with John

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp. 47 & 48

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p.198

<sup>3</sup> Philip Hensher, *The Northern Clemency*, Fourth Estate, London, 2008, p. 176

<sup>4</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes Of Us*, Granta, 2005, p. 241

King's stance in *Human Punk* published in 2001. The bleak description relies on the use of trivial, even sordid details:

I talk to the man next to me, and he's alright, served in Malaysia, in the jungle, fighting in the tropical heat, and now he's stuck on a bench in a new town, concrete taking over the forest, Coca-Cola rules the world. Coca-Cola, Kentucky Fried Chicken, McDonald's, Levi Strauss, Sky TV, Disney. The bin next to us is overflowing with polystyrene cups and cartons, chocolate milkshake dripping through a Pizza Hut straw, a small pool of brown mush on the pavement, packet wrappers and frozen chips, another run of Coke, McDonald's, KFC.<sup>1</sup>

The uniformity of the English towns is a recurrent theme throughout Barry Hines's recounts and is highlighted by the implicit analogies between Bristol and Sheffield: 'It's like Byron Street at home where we ride our bikes,'<sup>2</sup> and, 'He was wary of roads like this. He knew similar roads at home: had stood before similar heavy doors singing carols with his friends when he was little.'<sup>3</sup> The industrial cities appear interchangeable: 'They've knocked it all down to build some new offices'<sup>4</sup>, or further on, 'Mick drove slowly down the street between heaps of rubble. There wasn't a house in sight. Just wasteland, bordered on one side by the railway lines and on the other by a derelict factory.'<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines's choice to stress the timelessness of the working-class background contrasts starkly with the changes he is well aware of, as the following excerpt from *This Artistic Life* testifies:

(...) although, in recent years, EU funding has brought new jobs and new regeneration-scheme landscapes. Spoil heaps are now grassed over and planted with trees; vast, gleaming white call-centre complexes and retail parks stand where collieries and coking plants used to be; there are new red-and-beige housing developments and smooth new roads and brightly coloured distribution warehouses owned by globo-corps like IKEA.<sup>6</sup>

Barry Hines's comment implies that the new types of habitat have undermined the working-class solidarity. This bitter conclusion echoes Grant H. Kester's statement in *Out of Sight Is out of Mind: The Imaginary Space of Postindustrial Culture*:

If the concentration of large numbers of industrial workers in urban centers «produced» class consciousness (or produced a situation in which the working class could narrativize itself as a class), the postfordist logic of fragmentation and deconcentration resists the narrative construction of a working class, and resists the formation of discursive communities that might lead to a class consciousness.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John King, *Human Punk*, Vintage, London, 2001, p 319

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 172

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 171

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 172

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 172

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, Hebden Bridge, 2009, p. 161

<sup>7</sup> Grant H. Kester, *Out of Sight Is out of Mind: The Imaginary Space of Postindustrial Culture*, *Social Text*, No 35 (Summer, 1993), pp. 72-92



The uniformity of the urban settings and the absence of any regional or local specificity contribute to make Sheffield stand out as representative of any English city as its characteristics are smoothed out. The description is devoid of any specific idiosyncrasy, any monument, any striking feature to characterise the town. Moreover the economic changes affect all the areas regardless. The re-modelling of the urban scenery is only seen in a negative way as it translates the closing of the mines and steelworks. The new background is synonymous with the de-industrialisation of Britain and rampant unemployment. Only the negative results are envisioned and the nostalgic fondness to the former data betrays the inability to cope. On a par with the dehumanizing of the urban scenery the novelist decries the physical and social defacement of the working-class district. This is the topic of the next part of this chapter.

### **1. 3. The working-class district.**

The working-class district is the melting-pot of the community and everything is judged in accordance with the personal and concrete knowledge or experiences inside this microcosm. This physical, geographic and human isolation presents the working-class as a group shut up within a set of constraints accepted at times reluctantly and at times willingly. Richard Hoggart highlights this ostracism vividly in *The Uses of Literacy*:

#### *'The Neighbourhood'*

Home may be private, but the front door opens out of the living-room on to the street, and you go down the one step or use it as a seat on a warm evening you become part of the life of the neighbourhood.

To a visitor they are understandably depressing, these massed proletarian areas; street after regular street of shoddily uniform houses intersected by a dark pattern of ginnels and snickets (alley-ways) and courts; mean, squalid, and in a permanent half-fog; a study in shades of dirty-grey, without greenness or the blueness of sky; degrees darker than the north or west of the town, than 'the better end'.<sup>1</sup>

The popular areas appear as entities governed by implicit set of rules as the author reflects: 'But to the insider, these are small worlds, each as homogenous and well-defined as a village.'<sup>2</sup>

In an attempt to set a definition of the working-class district I have chosen to include the mine at the outset as it is part and parcel of the working-class members' daily environment described by Barry Hines. The mine looms large in the early novels as it represents the prime

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1957, p. 58

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 59

source of employment. The physical presence is rendered thanks to numerous precise details as the buildings tower in the neighbourhood. Barry Hines's first novel, *The Blinder*, published in 1966 underscore the proximity of the collier as follows: 'Behind the blackness of the yard the night sky was smudged with the lights of the pit, and whistles and grunts travelled out of the darkness, across the allotments on the back of the wind.'<sup>1</sup> The foremost importance of the mine remains the same in *First Signs*. It is revealed through the bewildered account of the hero during his return home after years spent abroad and in London. The candour of the depiction underlines the character's new awareness as he marvels:

Tom turned off the main road into the street where his parents lived, and there, at the bottom of the street, set behind fields was the pit and its muckstack. Tom was staggered by the size of the stack, it completely dominated the street and appeared to be much nearer the houses than he remembered. It stretched away like a monstrous barrow, completely blocking the view to the east of the colliery.<sup>2</sup>

The mine also serves as the background of the novel entitled *A Kestrel for a Knave*, but in this instance, Barry Hines merely describes the buildings and the slagheaps close to the countryside. The forbidding presence of the mine echoes the geographical and professional limitations of the members of the working-class:

Towards the city, a pit chimney and the pit-head winding gear showed above the rooftops, and at the back of the estate a patchwork of fields, black, and grey, and pale winter green; giving way to a wood, which stood on the far slope as clear as an ink blot.<sup>3</sup>

The whole plot of *The Price of Coal* revolves round the mine. It was initially written as a film script and is split into two parts: Prince Charles's visit to the mine on the one hand and the subsequent accident down the pit. The description strives to show every detail in a realistic way, and waxes convincing. Barry Hines depicts the work down the mine with a virtually scientific accuracy. This highly-detailed enumeration of the different chores completed down the pit is reminiscent of a realistic account by an eyewitness. The realist touch is achieved through the stress laid on the actual aspect of the mines for example through the miners' recurrent denunciations of the lack of repairs. The contrast between the derelict state of the underground galleries and the hasty preparations before the royal visit underlines the implicit criticism. The accuracy of the images of the miners' trek down the mine to the seam translates the humanist involvement of Barry Hines for this professional domain where

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 118

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 92

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 14

he has himself worked. The description goes on thus by delving into concrete details in accordance with the naturalist literary vein:

Some of the rings had buckled under the weight of the roof, and the corrugated iron sheets which lined the walls between them were bent from the continual pressure. In one place in the roof, jagged rock showed through where the tins had collapsed under a minor fall. The rubble and the metal sheets had been thrown to one side and now formed another obstacle, together with abandoned timber and cables and burst bags of stonedust which had been walked solid.<sup>1</sup>

The importance of the mine is not confined to its material presence, its primacy actually stems from the social and human links it cements within the working community. The image of the pit keeps haunting Tom Renshaw, the hero of *First Signs*, during his stay in London as he muses: ‘Do you know the quietest place in the world?’ (...) ‘Down the pit. If you wander off into some old workings where there are no men or machines, and sit down and turn your lamp off, the silence is terrifying.’<sup>2</sup> The impact of the mine on Barry Hines’s protagonists is corroborated by the assertion of Chris Kitchen, one National Union of Mine-workers which is quoted by Owen Jones in *Chavs*: ‘Mining communities were vibrant communities, but they were built around the pit. The pit was the heart of the community, it was the pit that bound everyone together.’<sup>3</sup> Yet the use of the past tense implies that the economic situation has changed drastically with the closure of pits. Barry Hines’s successive novels draw this historical chronicle implicitly thanks to the thorough descriptions of the drastic changes undergone by the working-class environment from the mid 1960s until post-industrial Britain.

All the characters in the novels by Barry Hines of our study live in the red-bricked terraced houses which spread monotonously until the limits of the towns. Numerous passages describe this set pattern of habitat. In his first novel, *The Blinder*, Lennie Hawk’s journey back home is summed up thus: ‘Through the market square and along the main road to the Anchor, where he turned off into a street of terraced houses. Sloame Street where he lived. Down the entry into the yard and along the flagstones to the kitchen.’<sup>4</sup> The young protagonist states the uniformity of the working-class habitat thus: ‘They’re all so alike, aren’t they?’<sup>5</sup> The similarities recur in the following passage from *The Price of Coal* reads: ‘All the houses in the street were of the same kind: two up, two down, with the front door opening straight on

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.71

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 16

<sup>3</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 55

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 16

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 58

to the pavement. The terraces were divided by entries which led to the yards at the back.’<sup>1</sup> This set-up looks very similar to the description by Alan Sillitoe of his own district in Nottingham when he was a child. The excerpt quoted by Stephen Daniels and Simon Rycroft in *Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe’s Nottingham Novels* sums up the striking likeness:

Our street was a straggling line of ancient back to backs on the city’s edge, while the enemy district was a new housing estate of three long streets which had outflanked us and left us a mere pocket of country in which to run wild.<sup>2</sup>

The urban background seems interchangeable since it represents a virtually national value because all the British industrial towns follow a similar layout. The typical geographical set-up with the shops just round the corner from the workers’ houses is sketched thus in *A Kestrel for a Knave*:

The betting shop was situated on a square of waste ground between two blocks of houses. At the back, the waste ground was separated from the back gardens of the houses in the next street by a wire fence. At each house a hole had been pulled in this fence, and short cuts led across the waste ground to the pavement. (...)

All round the betting shop craters had been dug in the earth and at their brims the mounds of displaced muck were patched with scraggy turf, like skins of moulting animals. The whole area was patched with scruffy grass, knotted with dead dock and sorrel, and spiked with old rose-bay spears. The skeleton of an elderberry bush had been bombarded and broken with half bricks, and all round it lay papers and cans, a saucepan, a bike frame, and a wheel-less pram.<sup>3</sup>

The geographic layout of the housing-estate where Billy Casper lives in *A Kestrel for a Knave* abides strictly by the traditional rules. It corresponds to a seemingly unchanging arrangement as the use of local family names in capital letters creates a feeling of homeliness and of continuity: ‘The fish and chip shop was one of a parade of shops at the end of the street. It stood next to the Co-op, which curved round the corner, and bore its first number of the next road, 2 Co-operative Road. FISH F HARTLEY CHIPS.’<sup>4</sup>

Although all of Barry Hines’s take place in working-class estates changes are underway. The successive modifications to the environment are shaping the shabbier and poorer settings of the later narratives. The economic recession takes its toll through the closure of shops and businesses in *First Signs*: ‘They passed a row of shops. They were all closed, but their windows were lit up, and groups of young people were standing around on

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.15

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Daniels and Simon Rycroft; *Mapping the Modern City: Alan Sillitoe’s Nottingham Novels*, Blackwell, 1993, pp. 463 & 464

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, pp. 121 & 122

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 124

the forecourt.<sup>1</sup> The author's censure underlines the worsening of the situation throughout his successive novels as he draws equally bleak backdrops. In *Unfinished Business* the deterioration is expressed by the heroin during a journey to her parents' house: 'It travelled out through the old industrial area, with its silent factories and attendant districts of decaying districts of decaying terraced houses.'<sup>2</sup>

The novel *Looks and Smiles* encapsulates the economic recession of the early 1980s. The hardships are recurrently referred to through mundane examples. The geographical upheaval is shown through precise details affecting the working-class members's everyday life. One striking example is the closures of shops: 'They walked away past the row of shops. The grocery shop next to the launderette had closed down too and, at the end of the row, an electrical goods shop was holding a Final Sale.'<sup>3</sup> The bleak economic situation is mirrored by the dismal background which is described in a naturalist vein:

He got off the bus and ran across the wasteland towards a row of council houses on the far side. He followed the bike track (...) then cut across rougher ground past piles of rubble, deep puddles, a discarded mattress and a pram without wheels. Only the concrete posts remained of the fence that should have separated the back gardens of the houses from the wasteland, so Mick was able to run straight across the lawn and enter Phil's house by the back door.<sup>4</sup>

The cutbacks are denounced through their practical consequences in *Looks and Smiles*, 'She had walked it from the supermarket at the other side of the estate. The bus service through the estate had been cancelled and now the buses only ran along the main road into town.'<sup>5</sup> The description encapsulates the blatant criticism: 'As she was picking up the bags, a passing car splashed through a pot-hole near the kerb. The hole was so deep that the water cleared the tall grass on the verge and landed on her legs and coat.'<sup>6</sup> The whole narration is studded with similar down-to-earth examples: 'Mick just concentrated on the road with his hands ready on the brakes. The surface was rough, the bicycle had no lamps and most of the street lights had been switched off early as part of the expenditure cuts.'<sup>7</sup> The expression 'expenditure cuts' crops up throughout the novel and sums up the drastic economic measures taken during the harsh economic crisis in the early 1980s. The narration adopts the

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 174

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 201

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 145

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 137

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 57

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 57

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 78

style of a documentary as sounds out as an indisputable testimony appealing to the readers' humanist understanding:

Mick and Alan and two of their friends were playing on a motor-cycle on a piece of wasteland on the council estate where they all lived. The Council had started to clear the site for new houses by knocking down a terrace of old ones, but they had been forced to suspend work because of government cuts in public expenditure.<sup>1</sup>

No economic sector whatsoever remains unaffected by the cutbacks, 'Mick (...) then cut across a stretch of wasteland which the Council had planned to convert into a public garden, but had never started because of the public expenditure cuts.'<sup>2</sup> The same idea is expressed by countless examples as follows: 'Mick searched the upstairs windows but they had not been cleaned for months and were too dirty to see through. The Transport Department had been forced to dismiss half of the cleaning staff because of the latest cuts in public expenditure.'<sup>3</sup> Every sector is affected by the budgetary restrictions:

They crossed the road, then walked round the corner into Chatsworth Street which the Council had started to convert into a pedestrian precinct. The architects' drawings on display in the window of the Halifax Building Society showed what it would look like when it was finished; with shoppers resting on benches in the shade of mature trees, raised beds of flowers and shrubs, and families strolling across the paving stones in the direction of W.H. Smith, British Home Stores and Freeman Hardy and Willis.

But work had only just started when further cuts in public expenditure had forced the Council to suspend the scheme. The tarmac had been drilled off and some holes dug, but the pavements and roadway were still at different levels and it still looked like a street. Traffic had been banned from the street though, and people could stroll across the broken ground if they wanted to, or rest on the heaps of sticky clay.<sup>4</sup>

The thorough description spares no trite details. In *Looks and Smiles* numerous acts of vandalism are alluded to: 'Mick stood in the bus shelter, but it offered little protection against the slanting rain because all the windows had been broken, and he became as wet waiting as he would have been if he had walked it. One woman in the shelter even had her umbrella up'<sup>5</sup>, up'<sup>5</sup>, and 'One afternoon a few weeks later, Mick and Alan were sitting on the swings in the recreation ground on the estate. They were using the babies' swings because the big swings were either broken or wrapped round the horizontal bar at the top of the frame.'<sup>6</sup> The choice of the objects mentioned is significant as it delves into material goods used daily: 'The telephone had been knocked off the rest. Mick felt for it down the side of the box. There was

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p.9

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 88

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 105

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 27

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 12

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 34

nothing there! He lifted up the wire and stared at the raw end. It had the unfinished look of a fishing line without a hook.’<sup>1</sup> Chronic unemployment and social unrest punctuate the narration with precise instances. The strike of the dustmen reads: ‘The litter bin was overflowing and a pile of bulging sacks lay on the pavement nearby. No rubbish had been collected for a fortnight now because the refuse collectors had gone on strike as a protest against further redundancies.’<sup>2</sup> The narration teems with sordid details such as a tramp rummaging in dustbins amongst heaps of litter blown about by the wind. The style adopts the journalistic style and harks on the matter-of-fact and sordid items:

The litter bin was overflowing and a pile of bulging sacks lay on the pavement nearby. No rubbish had been collected for a fortnight now because the refuse collectors had gone on strike as a protest against further redundancies. When the tramp began to rummage in the bin, chip papers and plastic wrappers fell out and blew away down the street.<sup>3</sup>

The novel entitled *The Heart of It* is also set in the early 1980s but the literary treatment differs since the hero discovers the events years later, during his visit to his dying father. The narration unrolls as a discovery journey by a prodigal son in the process of finding out what actually happened during the miners’ strike. The criticism is just as virulent as it is based on precise examples and accusations. The decay of the industrial background reads as follows: ‘It’s a right dump, the whole place is on its last legs’<sup>4</sup>, and ‘a clapped-out mining town.’<sup>5</sup> Depictions abound to stress the drastic changes undergone by the working-class environment such as the incipit of the narrative: ‘The houses had been demolished. A peeling hoarding advertised FACTORY UNITS TO LET, but Cal remembered the people who used to live there.’<sup>6</sup> A plethora of trivial details delineate the economic depression as the protagonist ponders glumly: ‘Most of the shops which hadn’t already closed down had sales. SALE! SALE! SALE! (...) He wished he was in Albania, Romania, Bosnia! He wished he was anywhere but here. It was like the Third World.’<sup>7</sup> The criticism goes crescendo throughout the novel as the hero’s journey unravels and his bitterness and despair are vented as he shows his French girlfriend the area where he grew up:

I’ll show you a real wreck if you want to see one.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 87

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 28

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 28

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 4

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 88

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 1

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 33

They turned off the main road and drove around the council estate: street after street of shabby houses, some bricked up, some burnt out. An abandoned car. A police car. A gang of youths running away. A toddler in a vest paddling in a pothole. A pack of dogs snarling round the car when Cal slowed down to avoid a plundered cigarette machine lying in the road.  
(...) It was like driving through a war zone.<sup>1</sup>

The dismal nature of the working-class habitat is scathingly criticised by various characters. The bitter comment by one of the teachers in *First Signs* airs this disapproval as follows: ‘God, I’m glad I don’t live on this estate, aren’t you Tom? It goes on and on, and it’s so depressing.’<sup>2</sup> The author stresses the impact of the living conditions in a similar way to Richard Peet’s assertion in the article entitled *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory* published in 1975: ‘The most important components of physical environment are house and neighbourhood, which influence the individual’s productivity through factors such as physical and mental health.’<sup>3</sup>

The endless rows of terrace houses remain synonymous with the English industrial towns in Barry Hines’s writing in spite of the advent of the high-rise flats. This recent type of habitat is mentioned in *First Signs* as follows:

The four tower blocks of flats had been designed as the corner points of a communal square, defining and pegging down its area. The square had been broken up into multi-levelled areas of concrete flagstones and lawns, all linked by steps and wedge shaped ramps. The lawns had been planted with saplings, each one protected by a ring of spiked railings, and the concrete terraces decorated with pieces of concrete sculpture.<sup>4</sup>

The criticism is blatant through the drawbacks of this kind of housing: ‘There was more litter in the foyer of the flats. As they opened the glass doors it blew round and round in a corner, like a dog chasing its tail.’<sup>5</sup> In *Looks and Smiles*, the description of the architectural innovations adopts the vein of a rigorous scientific presentation and pinpoints the setbacks inherent to this kind of buildings. The condemnation is expressed by the stress laid on technical points:

The flats opened on to a long outside balcony – ‘streets of the sky’ they had been called in the newspapers when the flats were opened. These ‘streets’, which were sheltered

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 262

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 174

<sup>3</sup> Richard Peet, *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1975), pp. 564-571

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 201

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 201 & 202



from the rain (and the sun) by the balcony above, formed perfect wind tunnels and remained chilly even on the warmest days.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's comments remain moderate compared with Beatrix Campbell's analysis as she denigrates the harmful consequences of this new type of habitat on the social and human relationships within the working-class. In *Wigan Pier Revisited*, she bewails the demise of the former solidarity in the recount of her journey through the North of England in the early 1980s:

The architects built a system of simulated streets in the air and presumably the people are supposed to play their part in making it all a success by playing in those streets, which measure three meters wide. There is nothing in the 'street' other than front doors – no shops, pubs or laundries, cafés or telephone boxes, no places to gather. So the only point of being in the street is to come and go, which is precisely all that people do.<sup>2</sup>

The young couple's escapade to Bristol to visit Karen's father highlights the bleak uniformity of the working-class habitat in *Looks and Smiles*. Once again, the attention to details, for example the precise address of the heroine's relative with the name of the district and the number of his flat, works out a convincing authenticity. This similitude steals the emblematic statute of *Sheffield* indeed, but it stresses the universality of the message conveyed:

Hathersage Gardens was a street of dilapidated Victorian houses, the majority of which had been converted into flats and bedsitting rooms. Limp nets and ill-fitting curtains suggested furnished accommodation and most of the front gardens were either overgrown or scuffed bare.

At number fifty-one (the number was painted crudely on the stone gate-post), the privet hedge was so neglected that it overhung the pavement the width of two flag stones and reached as high as the top of the bay window.<sup>3</sup>

The background of *Elvis Over England*, published in 1998, betrays the impact of the decline of the heavy coal and steel industry to the benefit of tertiary activities, 'He drove along the dual carriageway, past acres of reclaimed land, where sports centres and shopping malls replaced the steelworks he had worked in for thirty-five years, before being made redundant.'<sup>4</sup> The subtle and succeeding modifications of the geographic environment are recapitulated by the picturesque description of the hero's favourite tattoo parlour. The incongruity of the set-up permits spicy puns in Eddie's typically wacky sense of humour:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 154

<sup>2</sup> Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited. Poverty and Politics in the 80s*, Virago, 1984, p. 34

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp. 175 & 176

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 47

The Tiger Tattoo parlour was situated between a charity shop and a bookmaker's, a few minutes' walk along the road. It had been converted from a fish and chip shop and the frosted glass door panel was engraved with a galleon and a flying fish. During one session under the needle, Max, the tattoo artist and owner of the establishment, had told Eddie that one new customer had been so confused by the choice of designs around the walls that, in desperation, he had finally settled for a galleon on one bicep and a flying fish on the other.<sup>1</sup>

Michael Collins's sociological treatise, *The Likes of Us*, stresses the primordial part played by the geographic environment in the daily lives of the working-class members. He lampoons the changes within the working-class habitat during the second half of the twentieth century, and ascribes these harmful modifications to the successive waves of immigrants:

It would be impossible to attempt a biography of the urban working class without focusing on a particular landscape, as this class more than any other is inextricably linked with the concept of home, a street, a neighbourhood, a community. Yet historically the landscape of the urban working-class has been subject to more change than elsewhere because of redevelopment, the arrival of migrants en masse, and incessant attempts to accommodate its dense population.<sup>2</sup>

The dreary descriptions by Barry Hines in the novels of our corpus are corroborated by Owen Jones who bewails the ghettoisation of the popular areas in *Chavs*: 'how social mixing in council housing had declined and levels of unemployment had shot up on estates over the last thirty years.'<sup>3</sup> The new council estates contrast with the traditional rows of terrace houses. The diversity stems from the access to the property market by some working-class members since the early 1980s: 'In other words, what were once solid council estates may today include homeowners, private renters as well as council tenants.'<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines's humanism or naivety draws a picture which contrasts starkly with the extremely gloomy account vented by Lynsey Hanley in *Estates: An Intimate History*: 'Estates mean alcoholism, drug addiction, relentless petty stupidity, a kind of stir-craziness induced by chronic poverty and the human caged by the rigid bars of classes and learned incuriosity.'<sup>5</sup>

Concurrently Barry Hines associates the relentless defacement of the geographical background with the worsening of the economic situation. He acknowledges the relentless changes within the working-class districts but dismisses the subsequent splitting up of the group, which would mean the demise of the community. The next point deals with the main

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 77

<sup>2</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes Of Us*, Granta, London, 2005, p. 11

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 87

<sup>4</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 206

<sup>5</sup> Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History*, Granta Books, 2007, p. 7

component of the geographical background: the family house, and stresses its importance in working-class daily life.

#### 1. 4. Home.

The partitioning of the popular environment which plays an essential part in the understanding of their living background by the working-class protagonist is summed up thus in the book entitled *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart:

*There's No Place Like Home'.*

The more we look at working-class life, the more we try to reach the core of working-class attitudes, the more surely does it appear that the core is a sense of the personal, the concrete, the local : it is embodied in the idea of, first, the family and, second, the neighbourhood. This remains, though much works against it, and partly because so much works against it.<sup>1</sup>

The typical working-class habitat depicted by George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier* delineates the stereotypes which are still recognisable even if the living conditions have improved:

The interiors of these houses are always very much the same, though the number of rooms varies between two and five. All have an almost exactly similar living-room, ten or fifteen feet square, with an open kitchen range, in the larger ones there is a scullery as well, in the smaller ones the sink and copper are in the living-room.<sup>2</sup>

Barry Hines similarly stresses the analogies and monotony of the working-class quarters throughout his writings. The evolution and the undeniable improvements to the houses during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are delineated in the minute successive descriptions. The same attention to details characterises the author's works and sets the narrations in a historical and geographical grid. The author's first novel, *The Blinder*, written in 1966, shows the lack of comfort through the following narratives: 'The yard was black mud. Brick paths had been set across it to the row of lavatories and bin holes running parallel to the houses,'<sup>3</sup> and, 'He looked over to the lavatories and across the scabby allotments down to the pit pond, which shone solid like a blob of black ink, beneath the hump of the muck stack and the scramble of the pit.'<sup>4</sup> The lack of comfort is depicted through the references to the chores undertaken by the characters as follows: 'Then he ran outside and shovelled a

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 33

<sup>2</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin, London, 1989, p. 46

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 17

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 69

bucket of coal like someone in a silent film. He mended the fire and closed both doors?’<sup>1</sup> The hardships endured are underlined by the young protagonist’s complaints thus: ‘We ought to have fitted carpets and central heating up here. It wouldn’t be so bad getting up in a morning then.’<sup>2</sup> Coal fires, no heating and outside toilets constituted the common working-class habitat of the working-class as the realistic detailed portrayals imply. *A Kes for a Knave* is set in the same era and the depictions elicit the same drabness of the habitat. The very first lines of the text depict the room where the two brothers are sleeping in the same bed. The paucity of the house echoes the lack of love and respect within the dysfunctional family: ‘There were no curtains up. The window was a hard edged block the colour of the night sky. Inside the bedroom the darkness was of a gritty mixture. The wardrobe and bed were blurred shapes in the darkness.’<sup>3</sup>

The stark background is sketched as we witness the hero fulfilling daily tasks. Billy Casper’s endeavours to light the fire are shown with an extreme attention to details and the use of appropriate terms borrowed from local expressions, which are now obsolete:

He knelt down in front of the empty grate and scrunched sheets of newspaper into loose balls, arranging them in the grate like a bouquet of hydrangea flowers. Then he picked up the hatchet, stood a nog of wood on the hearth and struck it down the centre. The blade hit and held. He lifted the hatchet with the nog attached and smashed it down, splitting the nog in half and chipping the tile with the blade. He split the halves into quarters down through eights to sixteenths, then arranged these sticks over the paper like the struts of a wigwam. He completed the construction with lumps of coal, building them into a loose shell, so that sticks and paper showed through the chinks. The paper caught with the first match, and the flames spread quickly underneath, making the chinks smoke and the sticks crack.<sup>4</sup>

The classical layout of the working-class houses remains unchanged and is redolent of the Hayes’s poky lodgings in *Two Men from Derby*. The incipit of the play outlines the setting thus: ‘The kitchen of terraced house in the North of England, 1930.’<sup>5</sup> The plot is based on an anecdote in the life of the novelist’s grandfather, who was approached by Leicester Football Club to be signed on as a professional footballer. In the script, the unexpected call by the two recruiters reveals the working-class habitat with accuracy through the stage directions:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 167

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 143

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 7

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 9

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *Two Men from Derby*, Hutchinson of London, 1979, p. 19

[She opens the pantry door. We hear her go down the cellar steps, then we hear the sound of shovelling and she comes back up the steps carrying a large shovelful of coal. She throws the coal on the fire and puts the shovel down in the hearth.]<sup>1</sup>

The endless rows of similar terraced houses serve as the common backdrop of Barry Hines's novels as the following passage from *First Signs* reveals: 'The house was a two up two down. The stairs went straight up the middle of the house'.<sup>2</sup> A similar set-up is outlined in *The Price of Coal* thus: 'All the houses in the street were of the same kind: two up, two down, with the front door opening straight on to the pavement. The terraces were divided by entries which led to the yards at the back'.<sup>3</sup> These stereotyped descriptions present an environment steeped in tradition and verge on the caricature. This feeling of timelessness is aired by the heroin of *Unfinished Business*: 'just a few gloomy impressions remained: dreary identical houses, antimacassars in cold front rooms, the monkey-puzzle tree in the garden'.<sup>4</sup> An analogous impression of timelessness is voiced by the characters coming back to their working-class environments. This is the case of Karl Rickards in *The Heart of It* during his visit to his parents as he sarcastically alludes to 'the old aspidistra on its stand by the window'.<sup>5</sup> This is also the feeling vented by Tom Renshaw, in *First Signs*, as he comes back to his parents': 'It was the same cover, the same chair, the same sideboards and carpet; the same bulky furniture which channelled movement into tight corridors, and left the only decent space on the hearth'.<sup>6</sup> The timelessness of the background is rendered by the contrasting views from the opposite side of the house. The rural landscape at the back stands in sharp contrast with the urban scenery at the front of the building: 'At the bottom of the yard, behind the row of coal houses and lavatories, the fields began. The wheat and barley were just beginning to turn, and in the meadows the hay had been cut and harvested and cattle were grazing and resting in the shade of high hawthorn hedges'.<sup>7</sup> This bucolic setting differs from the industrial backdrop sketched thus:

Tom crossed the landing into his parents' bedroom and looked out of the window into the street. Across the street there was a row of old company houses. Above the roof-line of the houses there was a portion of the muck-stack, the pit-chimney, the tops of various buildings, and the still, spoked wheels of the winding gear.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Two Men from Derby*, Hutchinson of London, 1979, p. 24

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 96

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.15

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p.201

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 88

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 95

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 98

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., p. 98

Numerous detailed depictions emphasize the similarities of the working-class housing as they sketch the same typical layout. A recurrent trite instance is the shed situated at the end of the garden behind the house. This is the case in *A Kestrel for a Knave* as the following excerpt illustrates: 'Home, straight home, and straight down the garden to the shed. (...) Billy tapped the bars, then hurried back up the path to the garage.'<sup>1</sup>, and, in *Looks and Smiles*: 'He had a cup of tea, then went out to the garage in the back garden.'<sup>2</sup>

On a par with the accurate descriptions of the outside setting Barry Hines depicts the typical interior of the miners' homes with a plethora of mundane details. The exactness of the observation and of the rendering is reminiscent of the characteristics of the British literary movement of the late 1950s and early 1960s: the 'Kitchen Sink Realism'. In *The Price of Coal*, the description ushers the reader into the kitchen where the miner's wife attends to her daily domestic chores:

Syd walked into the kitchen carrying a bunch of roses which he had just cut at the allotment. His wife, Kath, was at the cooker making his dinner. When she heard him come in, she took an egg out of the refrigerator and cracked it on the rim of the frying-pan.<sup>3</sup>

The episode relating the choice of the vase betrays the same attention to the slightest detail: 'Syd opened the doors of the cupboard where all the crockery and glassware was kept.'<sup>4</sup> The living-room is scrutinised with a similar thoroughness. The layout of the rooms, of the furniture and the glut of trinkets pitch an example of stereotyped British working-class home:

He carried the rose through into the living-room where Mark, his youngest son, was sitting on the settee with his legs up watching a cricket match on television. (...) Syd stood in the doorway and looked round for the best place to put the rose: too many ornaments on the sideboard and mantelpiece, too hot on top of the television. He settled for the windowsill, removed the porcelain Shire horse and placed the vase in the centre of the sill.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, Barry Hines refers to the evolution of the habitat and eulogises the attempts at improving the working-class environment. The diachronic changes are accurately reported in *Unfinished Business* as the character enthuses about the modernisation of the houses: 'Phil thought about his mother as he drove down Linnet Close. He imagined her sitting beside him looking out approvingly at the modern detached houses and dormer bungalows, the neat front

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 108

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, p. 22

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.12

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 13

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 13

gardens and caravans on the drives.’<sup>1</sup> The enthusiasm resulting from the modifications in the daily living conditions is a recurrent theme. The excitement in moving to a more comfortable place is summed up thus in *Unfinished Business*: ‘How she had looked forward to leaving their back-street terraced house to come and live in the country,’<sup>2</sup> and, as follows in *The Heart of It*: ‘It was a decent estate one time, a nice place to live. My mother thought it was marvellous when we moved here. A new house with a bathroom and all mod cons. She was thrilled to bits with it.’<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines reports accurately another change in the working-class habitat through the advent of high-rise flats. The initial improvement in physical comfort is enthusiastically emphasized in *First Signs* in the following excerpt:

I like this, it’s lovely. It’s new, central heating, nice kitchen, easy to keep clean. It’s like a palace compared with what I was used to. But it’s the flats I don’t like. Well, I mean it’s not natural living up in the air is it. And the estate, you just don’t feel as though you belong anywhere.<sup>4</sup>

Yet the merely material improvements are soon outweighed by the drawbacks summed up by this inhabitant as she bemoans: ‘Flats are no places to bring kids up in, kids need a bit of ground to move about on. I mean, what can they do? When they’re outside they’re too far away from their mothers. They can’t play in the corridors. They can’t even have pets.’<sup>5</sup> The descriptions of the blocks of flats in *Looks and Smiles* follow the same scrupulous attention to details. However any positive facet of this type of habitat is precluded from this novel set in the early 1980s. The filth and dereliction of the buildings are evoked by the young visitor thus:

He counted up to the twelfth floor and scanned the windows, but he did not know which flat it was. The children took no notice of him as he walked into the foyer, they were too busy writing on the walls with felt-tipped pens and aerosols sprays.

He held his breath in the lift and read the graffiti to take his mind off the stink.<sup>6</sup> stink.<sup>6</sup>

The impact of the economic crisis upon the daily conditions of the working-class is emphasized recurrently in *Looks and Smiles* through the enumeration of the cutbacks implemented by Margaret Thatcher’s government. In *Unfinished Business*, the relentless degradation of the geographical environment is analysed as follows: ‘But things were

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 109

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 262

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, pp. 206 & 207

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., pp. 207 & 208

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 154

different then. Everybody had jobs. It's lack of work, lack of money, lack of hope. That's what's caused this.'<sup>1</sup> The historical events during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century which have re-modeled the British working-class habitat belie the Marxist theory expounded by Richard Peet in the article *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory*:

Problems appear only when an economic depression reverses the process (producing low wages, cut-backs in services, and so on), or when the overwhelming realization of a lack of mobility opportunity pierces the myth that "everyone has a chance if he works hard enough." When whole groups realize they have no chance to improve their lot, that a central city slum or a worn-out working-class neighbourhood is going to be their home and their children's home for life, the potential for widespread protest exists.'<sup>2</sup>

The economic recession of the early 1980s culminating in the British miners' strike of 1984-1985 appears as the key moment in the evolution of the working-class. Ian Procter outlines the schism thus in the article entitled *The Privatisation of Working-Class Life: A Dissenting View*, published in 1990:

Working-class life was becoming ever more home centred in the three overlapping senses of focusing on the nuclear family group of parents and children, engaging in activities within and around the home, generating a preoccupation with the home, its equipment, status and significance.<sup>3</sup>

In the article entitled *Out of Sight Is Out of Mind: The Imaginary Space of Postindustrial Culture*, Grant H. Kester explains the social rift as follows: 'The traditional, industrial working-class has been replaced by a stratum of highly paid, well-trained scientists and engineers who fuel the fires of technological innovation.'<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines denies the human and social schism and continues delineating a united social group in the grip of dire economic conditions throughout the novels of our corpus. His tenets about working-class culture and consciousness play down the impact of physical and material data. This formula echoes David Lockwood's conclusions which Rick Fantasia propounds thus in *From Class Consciousness to Culture, Action, and Social Organization* published in 1995: 'The class consciousness of

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 262

<sup>2</sup> Richard Peet, *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1975), pp. 564-571

<sup>3</sup> Ian Procter, *The Privatisation of Working-Class Life: A Dissenting View*, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 41, No 2 (Jun. 1990), pp. 157-180

<sup>4</sup> Grant H. Kester, *Out of Sight Is out of Mind: The Imaginary Space of Postindustrial Culture*, *Social Text*, No. 35 (Summer, 1993), pp. 72-92



particular social classes cannot be imputed, in any simple way, from their relations to the means of production, because of the extent of ideological variation with social classes.’<sup>1</sup>

Yet, Barry Hines stresses the effects of historical and economic events on the protagonists’ everyday lives through their environment. The changes are alluded to, for instance the selling of council houses voted during Margaret Thatcher’s tenure. In *Elvis Over England*, Eddie’s peremptory assertion to the painter that all his neighbours are tenants and therefore will not require his services translates the new geographical and social layout: ‘Sorry, mate, it’s a council house. You’re wasting your time round here. They’re nearly all council houses on this estate.’<sup>2</sup> The house embodies the inhabitant’s statute, both socially and financially, as the price bracket charged by the artist reveals, ‘He charged according to the district and the house. Usually it was obvious how much the customer could afford, but this job was more complicated ... council house, rough estate and the guy didn’t look like the chairman of the board. Yet he owns this classic American limo which must have cost him.’<sup>3</sup>

Whereas the houses sketched by Barry Hines remain fairly similar in the seven novels of our corpus, Michael Collins lists the recent changes to the working-class habitat in *The Likes of Us*:

They forked out for pelmets, cornices, carpets as high as pampas grass, and sofas in which the TV remote control could be lost amongst the plump cushions and the printed chintz. Television screens grew, picture frames expanded, became padded fit to burst in mock-William Morris fabric, and novelty magnets crept over frigdes like ivy.

The exteriors of the homes had begun to change too Lead strips criss-crossed windows. There were Welcome mats and plaques, and at Christmas, exteriors framed by lights with Santas and reindeer glowing on the rooftop.<sup>4</sup>

The members of the working-class who have benefited from the economic situation have been able to improve their homes. These assertions are corroborated by the data compiled by Eric Hopkins in *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990*. Since access to property was made possible quite a few wealthier members of the working-class purchased their houses:

The movement towards home ownership was certainly strong in the 1980s. In the past, some better-off workers had always owned their homes, but they had been a very small minority. By 1984, 13 per cent of the semi-skilled owned their houses outright, while a further 30 per cent owned them with a mortgage; of unskilled manual workers, 13 per cent owned their houses outright, and a further 23 per cent owned their houses

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<sup>1</sup> Rick Fantasia, *From Class Consciousness to Culture, Action, and Social Organization*. *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol 21 (1995), pp. 269-287

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, p. 49

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 51

<sup>4</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes Of Us*, Granta, London, 2005, p. 208

subject to mortgage. By the end of the 1980s, the proportion of working-class households owning their house was approaching 50 per cent. The twentieth-century image of the urban working-class family as council house tenants was beginning to change.<sup>1</sup>

Philip Hensher pinpoints and lampoons the selling of council houses in the early 1980s in *The Northern Clemency*, 'The building society was all at once awash with money, awash with other people's debt.'<sup>2</sup> The criticism continues, 'I'd like to know where people are supposed to live when they've sold off all the council houses,' Margaret said. 'Poor people, who couldn't get a mortgage, I mean'.<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines deliberately overlooks this affluent section of the working-class and only alludes to the negative consequences of the economic slump which hit Great-Britain in the early 1980s. This outlook contrasts with the optimistic opinion voiced by Peter Clarke in *Hope and Glory*, Britain 1900-1990: 'On council estates, a freshly painted front door and a copy of the Sun in the letterbox was a signal of Thatcher's achievement in remaking the Conservative Party.'<sup>4</sup> Richard Peet criticises scathingly the pervasive surge of consumerism during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a factor of inequality and injustice in *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory* as follows:

New trends in consumption are constantly introduced in the upper echelons of the social hierarchy, whence they diffuse downwards through an extremely efficient of system of consumption-oriented communications media, until even the very poorest people are infected by the newest commodity mania. The vast majority of people are caught in a never-ending struggle to earn sufficient income to allow them to consume in a style or volume similar to the pacesetters of the consumption group above them.<sup>5</sup>

Barry Hines's literary work highlights the specificities of the British working-class habitat by retracing the successive changes it has undergone during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Through recurrent allusions, the Midlands and Sheffield embody the stereotyped British industrial scenery from the mid 1960s until the late 1990s. The region, the town, the district, and, last but not least, the home, structure the human apprenticeship and maturity of the members of the working-class. The different impacts add up, oppose and coexist to shape and hone the inhabitants' cultural values. By resorting to extremely concrete descriptions, the geographical, social and human scenery drawn by Barry Hines encapsulates the relentless

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1991, p. 237

<sup>2</sup> Philip Hensher, *The Northern Clemency*, Fourth Estate, London, 2008, p. 384

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 389

<sup>4</sup> Peter Clarke, *Hope and Glory*, Britain 1900-1990, London, Penguin, 1996, p. 122

<sup>5</sup> Richard Peet, *Inequality and Poverty: A Marxist-Geographic Theory*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 65, No. 4 (Dec., 1975), pp. 564-571

alterations to the working-class environment. The historical events are recounted and serve as the backdrop to individual destinies in the grips of economic upheavals. The account of the worsening of the geographical working-class setting voices the author's humanist and political censure.

## **Chapter 2. Human representations : stereotyped characters.**

The characters described by Barry Hines in the nine novels and the play of our corpus are all members of the contemporary British working-class and are described with the housing-estate in the background. The writer's empathy towards the representatives of this social group is obvious and underpins his whole literary works. We are going to study the mixed group of characters in order to try and draw a definition of the writer's range of typical representatives of the popular class. The writer's rendition of the British working-class is reminiscent of Raymond Williams's definition in *The Long Revolution* which states that the term: 'working-class has traditionally described the great body of wage-earners who came together in relation to the new methods of production.'<sup>1</sup> We will then analyse the family relationships within the social group. Barry Hines underlines their importance in a similar way to the assessment by Raymond Williams in *The Welsh Industrial Novel* as he stresses the sociological impact: 'the lives of individuals, however intensely and personally realised, are not just influenced but in certain crucial ways formed by general social relations.'<sup>2</sup> Then the accent will be laid on feminine roles and the women's position during the second half of the 20th century. Last but not least we will scrutinise the ambiguous role of the hero, or maybe anti-hero whose 'problem must not be so inflated as to reintroduce romance, yet who must command interest despite the setbacks he suffers'<sup>3</sup> according to Philippe Hamon's theory quoted in the introduction of *Realism* by Lilian R Furst. With chronic unemployment and a drastic economic recession in the background can we still speak about a working-class hero in the narrations studied? The uniqueness of the writer's description of the characters lies in his deep empathy as they all appear as loveable despite their shortcomings and flaws. The working-class group looks timeless as the outside factors such as the feminisation of the workforce and globalisation seems to have very little impact on the cohesion of the group. Barry Hines's description of a working-class similar to that of his youth echoes the assertion by Georg Lukacs: 'It is evident that writers will tend to present an inside picture of the class on which their own experience of society is based.'<sup>4</sup> This nostalgic approach raises

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Columbia University Press, 1961, p. 316

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, University College Cardiff Press, 1979, p. 11

<sup>3</sup> Lilian R Furst, *Realism*, Longman, 1992, p. 13

<sup>4</sup> Georg Lukacs, *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Merlin Press, London, 1963, p. 94

reservations about the relevance of the portrayal of the set of characters throughout the economic and social upheavals during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2. 1 The stereotyped image of the working-class.**

The members of the working-class members depicted by Barry Hines in the novels of our corpus constitute a social and human microcosm hemmed in by geographic, historic and economic restraints. The description is general and applies to a multitude of characters. Class solidarity is inherent to the working-class members' everyday lives and shapes their outlooks. In the writer's literary world, their personal characteristics therefore appear sometimes blurred. The protagonists are typical of the popular class they belong to, but without being rigged out with threadbare stereotypes. The narration has a firm footing in a concrete setting thanks to the depiction of everyday actions. The use and analysis of reality grant the narration an aura of veracity and appeal to the readers' humanism. The heterogeneous group of members of the working-class appears tightly linked by the features which weave the community together. The unity of this social group is a recurrent theme in working-class literature, which spans the geographic regions and the historic eras. Richard Hoggart's definition of a typical member of the British working-class in *The Uses of Literacy*, highlights the stereotypes and prejudices from the late fifties:

A working-class man often seems to me almost physically recognizable. He tends to be small and dark, lined and sallow about the face by the time he has passed thirty. The bone structure of the face and neck shows clearly, with a suggestion of the whippet about it. In general, these physical marks are observable early, and remain throughout life. Thus – though this is lightly put –if I or some of my professional acquaintances who were born into the working-classes put on the flat cap and neckerchief which go with looking 'country', so if we leave our collars open, the sit of the cap and the neckerchief, or the structure of the bones round the neck make us look, not like the sporting middle-classes but like working-men on a day off.<sup>1</sup>

The image of the typical worker sporting the famous 'flat cap' still acts as a cliché nowadays through the ridiculed silhouette of Andy Capp. These old prejudices date back to the advent of the 'working-class hero' in the British novel as early as the mid 1840s, that-is-to-say the beginning of the country's urbanisation due to the Industrial Revolution. Besides, the characters presented in novels such as *Sybil* whose subtitle reads *The Two Nations*, written by Benjamin Disraeli and published in 1840, or *Mary Barton* (1848) and *North and South* (1855) by Elizabeth Gaskell, or still *Hard Times* (1854) by Charles Dickens, really looked like aliens to readers who did not have any contact with the working-class. This kind of

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp 53 &54.

stereotypes still people George Orwell's writings in the 20th century. The simplistic depictions may look hackneyed, even caricatural at times, yet, it is still thanks to these pioneering writers who have let the workers have their say that the popularisation of the working-class literature was made possible in Great-Britain.

Raymond Williams questions the realism of working-class novels in *The Long Revolution* as he objects: 'The realist novel needs, obviously, a genuine community: a community of persons linked not merely by one kind of relationship – work or friendship or family – but by many, interlocking kinds. It is obviously difficult, in the twentieth century, to find a community of this sort.'<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines's writings refute this assessment as the author has faith in the resilience of the group in the face of the successive economic ups and downs. The changes, which he avowed, are the replacement of the miners from the earlier novels by factory workers, and then by unemployed protagonists.

Barry Hines shuns the idyllic depictions and candidly draws rounded characters in keeping with Philippe Hamon's definition of the 'realist discourse, always in search of transparency and the circulation of knowledge [which] will strive to reduce the imbalance that exists between the being and the appearance of characters.'<sup>2</sup> Clichés of the miners as typical representatives of the working-class abound in British literature and rely on images from the past dating back to the 1930s like the following depictions by George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: Here is the typical image of the colliers at work, 'poor drudges underground, blackened to the eyes, with their throats full of coal dust, driving their shovels forward with arms and belly muscles of steel.'<sup>3</sup> The narrator's eulogy goes on thus:

It is only when you see miners down the mine and naked that you realise what splendid men they are. Most of them are small (big men are at a disadvantage in that job) but nearly all of them have the most noble bodies; wide shoulders tapering to slender supple waists, and small pronounced buttocks and sinewy thighs, with not an ounce of waste flesh anywhere<sup>4</sup>.

Beatrix Campbell rejects this imagery as sheer idealization. She lambasts this image of men's work and masculinity in her exposé on poverty and politics in the early 1980s. The record of her journey following a similar itinerary to George Orwell's nearly fifty years later, describes candidly the social and human havoc wreaked by the drastic economic measures under Thatcherism. Her feminist criticism of the clichés about the miners reads as follows in *Wigan Pier Revisited*:

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1961, p. 286

<sup>2</sup> Lilian R. Furst, *Realism*, Longman, 1992, p. 178

<sup>3</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin, 1989, p. 31

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 20

Miners are men's love object. They bring together all the necessary elements of romance. Life itself is endangered, their enemy is the elements, their tragedy derives from forces greater than them, forces of nature and vengeful acts of God. That makes them victim and hero at the same time, which makes them irresistible – they command both protection and admiration. They are represented as beautiful, statuesque, shaded men. The miner's body is loved in the literature of men, because of its work and because it works.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's description of the miners at work steers clear of this almost deification by adopting the vein of an official record as the following excerpt from *First Signs* illustrates:

The men stopped work, and crawled off the face into the heading, where it was high enough for them to stand up. They were disguised by their muck. Only their eyes and lips seemed to belong to their faces, they appeared to be seeing and speaking from behind black masks. Some of them were wearing shirts, others just singlets and trousers. Their lamp batteries hung heavily from the backs of their belts, and their knee pads shortened and flared their trousers, revealing fully their clogs and their boots.<sup>2</sup>

The place bestowed to the miners in Barry Hines's early novels underlines the prime part they played up to the early 1980s since a mere allusion conjures up an imagery which transcends class and time. In the very first narration of our corpus, *The Blinder*, the miner is lionised as follows: 'He enclosed her hand in his big white paw. Blue mining scars mottled the hairy back and knuckles,'<sup>3</sup> and, 'Lennie took his coat off and crouched down on his heels in front of the fire. (...) 'Tha's how the miners sit, isn't? I've seen them at the street corners. They say they can sit like that for hours.'<sup>4</sup> The typical stance of the miners is recalled in *First Signs*: 'He crouched down, the miner's crouch, weight on the balls of his feet, forearms resting on his thighs, and looked into the flames.'<sup>5</sup> The colliers' specificity is highlighted in the following extract from an article by Alain Touraine entitled *Management of the Working Class in Western Europe*, published in 1964. The French researcher's generalisation applies to miners worldwide as he stresses their particularity: 'They do not struggle, like the printers or the masons, to defend their craft, since their activity is defined primarily in terms of hard work and output. It is not their work but their capacity to work that is involved, and that is, according to them, exploited by the employer.'<sup>6</sup> The uniqueness of their involvement is further deployed thus: 'The context in which they see themselves is not the abstraction of the economic development; it is the nation or the region, that is, a concrete social or cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited. Poverty and Politics in the 80s*, Virago, 1984, p. 97

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, pp. 211 & 212

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 83

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., pp. 138 & 139

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 76

<sup>6</sup> Alain Touraine, *Management and the Working Class in Western Europe*, *Daedalus*, Vol. 93, No. 1, *A New Europe?* (Winter, 1964), pp. 304-334

community.’<sup>1</sup> The hardships endured are implicitly implied by the returning protagonist in *First Signs* as he wonders:

What he had forgotten were the faces of the people he saw in the villages, how they differed from the bland and urban faces of Central London. How hard and raw they looked, how worn and rough. These were the faces of the industrial working class. They reflected centuries of oppression, life-times of blighted expectations and scant rewards. They reflected a long history of bitter struggle for their rightful share of the wealth which they had produced.<sup>2</sup>

The primacy of the statute within the working-class is highlighted in the rendition of the British miners’ strike in the early 1980s in *The Heart of It*. Barry Hines’s scathing criticism is voiced thus:

It was a bastard of a place, the pit, but you couldn’t beat it for solidarity. That’s what the strike was about, you know. The miners were the only people Mrs Thatcher was scared of. She knew that if she could beat the miners, the rest of the unions would cave in and they’d be able to privatize everything.<sup>3</sup>

The closure of the pits implemented by Margaret Thatcher’s government is portrayed as the pivotal event in the re-modelling of British society. The change within the working-class is ruefully summarised as follows in *The Heart of It*: ‘You never hear anything now. It’s not the same round here any more. When the pit closed it knocked the spirit out of the place.’<sup>4</sup> The thorough shift within the working-class is summarised thus in an article co-written by Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Judi Addelston and Julia Marusza in 1997, entitled *In Secure Times: Constructing White Working-Class Masculinities in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century*:

With the erosion of union culture and no formal space left to develop and refine meaningful critique, some white working-class men, instead, scramble to reassert their assumed place of privilege on a race / gender hierarchy in an economy that has ironically devalued all workers.<sup>5</sup>

Barry Hines novels outline the re-shaping of the British working-class as the miners and factory workers of the earlier narratives are made redundant and replaced by unemployed protagonists. Yet the author focuses on the working-class members who have been affected by the dire economic recession of the early 1980s and ignores those who have benefited from the economic changes financially. His acceptance of the term class echoes the definition

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<sup>1</sup> Alain Touraine, *Management and the Working Class in Western Europe*, Daedalus, Vol. 93, No. 1, A New Europe ? (Winter, 1964), pp. 304-334

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 90

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 108

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 109

<sup>5</sup> Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Judi Addelston and Julia Marusza, (In) *Secure Times: Constructing White Working-Class Masculinities in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, Gender and Society, Vol. 11, No 1 (Feb., 1997), pp. 52-68



which reads thus: ‘British understanding of class (...) assumed three distinct forms: a finely graded pyramid; a three-tiered model of upper, middle, and lower; and a binary opposition of “us” versus “them”, the people against the powerful.’<sup>1</sup> in *Class Struggles* by Dennis Dworkin. Thus Barry Hines’s historical recount contrasts with Stephen Forster’s testimony of his social ascension in his auto-biographical novel entitled *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*. The successful working-class member is caricatured through television programmes vulgarizing this cliché through a catchy nickname based on oral play-on-words: ‘The eighties comedy stereotype, the plasterer ‘Loadsamoney’ was derived from thousands of prototypes.’<sup>2</sup>

Barry Hines explains his literary process in the preface to the anthology of short stories, thoughts and poems: *This Artistic Life*, published in 2009. He stresses the political commitment which underpins his whole writings. He voices the fear that his involvement may have warped his perception and may have resulted in caricatured characters: ‘The mainspring of my work is my political viewpoint. It fuels my energy; which is fine, as long as the characters remain believable and do not degenerate into dummies merely mouthing my own beliefs.’<sup>3</sup> The writer’s avowed sources are extremely traditional as his explanation unravels: Most of the people I write about live in places like this or in old terraced houses or on vast council estates. They work in pits and factories, and most of them have failed the 11-plus, and went to secondary modern schools.’<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines’s presentation of the characters follows the realistic vein expounded by Philippe Hamon which Lilian Furst uses in the chapter entitled *Philippe Hamon on the Major Features of Realist Discourse from Realism*:

The realistic text is therefore characterised by a marked redundancy and foreseeability of its content. For example, the character presupposes: (a) the description of his physical sphere of activity (socio-professional environment); (b) the description of the place of his activity (the priest will be described in his church, the butcher in his store, etc.); (c) the description of his professional activity itself (the butcher will be described in his store making his sausage; the priest in his church saying mass, etc.)<sup>5</sup>

The foreseeability of the descriptions is a recurrent characteristic of Barry Hines’s narrations which span four succeeding decades. The economic data actually split up the compilation since the earlier novels delineate a fairly affluent era in stark contrast with the gloomy two last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century characterised by a high rate of unemployment and insidious globalisation. The writer’s blatant empathy for his characters smooths over the flaws

<sup>1</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, Longman, 2007, p. 131

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working –class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p 10

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, Introduction.

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 3

<sup>5</sup> Lilian R. Furst, *Realism*, Longman, London, 1992, p. 173

and grants each of them their unique stature. Barry Hines's literary treatment of the onomastic data is reminiscent of the antiquated working-class habit which encapsulates the identity within one Christian name, generally quite an old-fashioned one. The scanty repertory of names demands the use of the possessive adjective. This joining smacks of a traditional and somewhat obsolete use and is much more frequent in the oldest narrations of this study. Billy Casper often refers to his brother by using the old-fashioned expression 'our Jud'<sup>1</sup> in *A Kestrel for a Knave*. During one of the countless quarrels Billy takes part in, the other pupils refer to his brother as 'your Jud'<sup>2</sup>. The very first lines of *The Price of Coal* introduce plainly the different protagonists by their sole Christian names; the miners' identity is summed up by Syd, Harry, Geoff and Tony. On the other hand the mine directors and the foremen are presented by their surnames. This literary process underlines the distance between the two groups. In this novel the colliers' wives gathered after the accident mention their sons as follows: 'Our Alan and your Tony'<sup>3</sup> or 'Our Ronnie'<sup>4</sup>. The reference to a daughter follows the same pattern, 'Our Linda.'<sup>5</sup> In *Looks and Smiles*, which is set in the early 1980s, Mrs Wright dotingly calls her son by the affectionate expression 'our Alan'.<sup>6</sup>

Even the most attentive reader would be incapable of giving the colour of Billy Casper's hair or eyes in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, of Syd in *The Price of Coal*, of Alan Walsh in *Looks and Smiles* or of Eddie in *Elvis Over England*, to name only a few of Barry Hines's heroes. The personal features are only lightly sketched. The characters move around like shadows amidst a dreary background. The impression that all these silhouettes are interchangeable is obvious in *A Kestrel for a Knave*: 'Billy passed two miners returning silently from the night shift. A man in overalls cycled by, treading the pedals slowly. The four of them converged, and parted pursuing their various destinations at various speeds.'<sup>7</sup> Billy Casper, who always feels at bay, lurks amid this ballet performed by silent shadows. The puny, dirty and dishevelled figure keeps lurking through the narration, just like the urchins depicted by Charles Dickens, or like Dicky Perrot in *A Child of the Jago* by Arthur Morrison. Billy Casper does not belong to any group whatsoever and embodies the image of the social pariah. His lonely figure stands in stark contrast with the other upbeat children:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 75, p. 124 & p. 142

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 75

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 146

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 127

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 146

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 114

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 10

The estate was teeming with children: tots hand in hand with their mothers, tots on their own, and with other tots, groups of tots and Primary School children; Secondary School children, on their own, in pairs and in threes, in gangs and on bikes. Walking silently, walking on walls, walking and talking, quietly, loudly, laughing; running, chasing, playing, swearing, smoking, ringing bells and calling names: all on their way to school.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines depicts the subordinate protagonists with the same care and realism as the main characters in the limelight. In *The Price of Coal* the descriptions of the miners are kept to the minimum and seem to make them interchangeable. In the following example Tony's irruption in his typical work clothes into the offices astounds the onlookers. The feeling of uneasiness is conveyed thus:

Tony stood in the doorway, incongruous in his pit clothes and muck in the newly-decorated and furnished office. He hadn't even taken his lamp in. The cable was hanging round his neck and the lamp was still on, shining down on the carpet.<sup>2</sup>

The hermeneutic value of clothes is illustrated by the over-simplified representation of the different jobs. In *Looks and Smiles*, simplistic posters displayed at the job-centre classify the different professional domains through the clothes worn. The social hierarchy is symbolised by a wisely orchestrated changing of garments. This caricature uses the stereotypes of the British working-class culture to back up a political message:

Mick stood up and went to look at the posters on the walls, which illustrated in comic-strip fashion the career structures of various industries. In the manual trades, the workers always started off in overalls, changed halfway up the chart into a white smock, and emerged at the top triumphant and smiling in a dark suit.<sup>3</sup>

In this novel, Barry Hines uses a similar literary device in the portrayal of Alan Wright on leave from the army as the metamorphosis of the young conscript is pinpointed by his childhood friend. A tiny, nonetheless insidious distance, settles between the two young men as it foreshadows the surrender by the new military recruit of his working-class roots: 'Mick had only seen him in his army sweater for a few minutes, but he thought it suited him better than the clothes he was wearing now.'<sup>4</sup> Clothes and material goods establish social status and build up each character's identity. This is the case of the well-off drivers Eddie glares at with envy during his peregrination to Scotland. The importance bestowed on personal belongings is transcribed by the hero's typically colourful vocabulary in *Elvis Over England*:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 18

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 115

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 13

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 114

Stuck-up bastard in his pin stripes and Jag. But he didn't care. He didn't care about any of them now, whatever they were wearing or driving. But he used to, when he went into town to visit the Job Centre or to sign on. He would stare enviously at the BMWs and Mercs with striped umbrellas and pig-skin briefcases in the back.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's stress on material goods highlights their importance in his heroes' everyday lives, yet the author glosses over the primacy of the advent of mass consumption. The novelist lays the accent on one single item to set the place and the date. It is the case of the whole gallery of portraits sketched by Eddie in *Elvis over England*. The priest saying the mass at the burial of Eddie's mother is the first one of a colourful set of figures. The comic side of the situation relies on the preposterous juxtaposition of the phone and the cassock: 'He reached under his cassock and took out his mobile phone from his pocket.'<sup>2</sup> Secondary characters are reduced to one object like one of the children attending the funeral: 'Boston Red Sox bomber jacket.'<sup>3</sup> A similar image describes two youths in a café; the writer gives them as names the appellations about the baseball teams written on the backs of their tracksuits:

As he scanned the paper, he listened to two boys wearing baseball caps and baggy trousers sitting at the next table. 49ers instructed Yankees how to make gas meters run backwards in order to obtain free gas. Then with the aid of the salt pot, Yankees demonstrated the correct way to climb through a cat flap.<sup>4</sup>

One single detail suffices to set the narration historically and geographically. Barry Hines's successive novels highlight the changes but these remain secondary. The author's stance underscores the enduring idiosyncrasies of the British working-class in the face of the economic upheavals. This abiding outlook contrasts with the thorough social re-structuring which unravels as follows in *Class Struggles* by Dennis Dworkin:

A postindustrial working class – both a secure and privileged labour elite and a permanent underclass – was supplanting the industrial proletariat. The emergence of this new class spelled the demise of the established labour movement, for working-class experience no longer produced solidarity and collective consciousness or the aspiration to control the labour process.<sup>5</sup>

Barry Hines's empathy for his working-class heroes is obvious throughout his writings and glosses over the misdeeds which are played down in the face of a so-called innate honesty. This naïve leniency contrasts starkly with the hateful portrait of this social group by

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 76

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 1

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 1

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 76

<sup>5</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, Longman, 2007, pp. 72 & 73

Michael Collins in *The Likes of Us*. This diatribe sounds like a funeral oration as he spells out all the indelible defects of the new British working-class:

They were reputedly more obese than their equivalent throughout Europe. They loved Gucci, loathed the Euro. More important, to their pallbearers in the press they were racist, xenophobic, thick, illiterate, parochial. They survived on the distant memory of winning one world cup and two world wars, and were still tuning into the ailing soap that is the House of Windsor. All they represent and hold dear was reportedly redundant in modern, multicultural Britain. It was dead. Over. Otiose.<sup>1</sup>

The stereotyped image of the worker accuses him of all defects and ills. He is always the scapegoat and a butt to hackneyed jokes. Even the newly-acquired wealth does not even manage to conceal the typical working-class member's crass uncouthness. The scathing criticism on the sociological level levelled at the new British working-class reads thus: 'Often as the lazy beer-swilling, fag-smoking, chip-eating, wife-hating, armchair reactionary, or the autodidact whose efforts at self-improvement are blighted by uncouth relatives, malapropisms or Franglais.'<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines's empathic portrayal does not wane even through the 1980s and denies the volley of criticism levelled by Michael Collins: 'On screen, in the Eighties, the cap and the tea cosy moved aside for new staples of modern working-class life, and into the clearing came a figure who was brash, tasteless, uncouth, ill-mannered, upwardly mobile with a wad of new money.'<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines's denial of the demise of the old working class because of deindustrialisation is debunked by Owen Jones's sociological study entitled *Chavs. The demonization of the Working Class*. The in-depth study of the stigmatisation of the contemporary British working-class does not pull any punches through another version of the acronym as follows: 'Council Housed Antisocial Vermin.'<sup>4</sup> The scathing criticism continues in the same vein through the following peremptory assertion: 'Working-class people are sort of seen as a problem. They drink too much, they smoke too much, they don't look after their kids properly, they're work-shy.'<sup>5</sup> There seems such a huge difference between the two images of the same social group only a few years apart. Owen Jones is well aware of this discrepancy and stresses the drawbacks of the former working-class, '(it) did not adapt to the entry of women and ethnic minorities into the workforce.'<sup>6</sup> The former bleak account is reminiscent of the pessimistic account drawn in *The Precariat*, subtitled *The New Dangerous Class* by Guy Standing. This study of the contemporary class system highlights the advent of

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us*, Granta Books, London, 2004, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 7

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 209

<sup>4</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 190

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 86

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 88

a new social group stemming from the traditional working-class but without the political and human solidarity lauded throughout working-class literature. This essay, published in 2011, stresses the omnipotence of economics worldwide. Here is the etymology of this newly-coined term: ‘the precariat could be described as a neologism that combines an adjective ‘precarious’ and a related noun ‘proletariat’.’<sup>1</sup> The researcher hones his definition of this specific new social entity through its idiosyncrasies:

The precariat has class characteristics. It consists of people who have minimal trust relationships with capital or the state, making it quite unlike the salariat. And it has none of the social contract relationships of the proletariat whereby labour securities were provided in exchange for subordination and contingent loyalty, the unwritten deal underpinning welfare states.<sup>2</sup>

The similarities between the precariat and the traditional working-class are striking and the evolution is implicitly adumbrated by Barry Hines’s novels. The author recurrently refers to changes such as the rise of unemployment, the feminisation of the workforce and globalisation, yet the narrator downplays their effect. The overall impression remains the entrapment of the working-class members within their hierarchical code.

The next part deals with the erstwhile sacrosanct male part which is threatened by the advent of new social conditions.

## **2. 2. The typical male parts: father and husband.**

Barry Hines grants the male protagonist the principal part within the social group and even more within the household. This place tallies with the traditional image of the working-class couple and family. It is on a par with the following stereotyped image of the worker sketched in *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart in 1957. This place as the boss and the undisputed master, highlights the immobility which governs the family unit and dictates the daily human relationships:

The point of departure for an understanding of the position of the working-class father in his home is that he is the boss there, the ‘master in his own home’. This is by tradition, and neither he nor his wife would want the tradition to be changed. She will often refer to him before others as ‘Mr W.’, or ‘the mester’.<sup>3</sup>

Richard Hoggart carefully avoids any simplistic generalisation and alludes to the social changes, which were still shallow, yet already perceptible in the late 1950s, when his essay was published. He sums up thus the different facets of the part held by the typical

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class*. Bloombury Academic; 2011, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 8

<sup>3</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 54.

worker, that is to say the family member who works outside, who earns his living by working and who represents the only link with the rest of society:

In either case, there is likely to be a deference to him as the main breadwinner and heavy worker, even though these assumptions are not always correct today. He remains the chief contact with the outer world which puts the money into the house.<sup>1</sup>

The crucial part played by the father within the working-class family is underlined by Raymond Williams in his autobiography entitled *Border Country*, 'but a father is more than a person, he's in fact a society, the thing you grow up into.'<sup>2</sup> In the nine novels of our corpus the family remains the most important human frame and the links between parents and children and between siblings, weave the plot of the stories. Barry Hines's main male characters contrast with the brashness of Alan Sillitoe's. Jeremy Hawthorn condemns this male hegemony in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* as he criticises: 'Whereas in much of his (Sillitoe's) fiction it is only the man, the impatient, overweening, anarchic man, who is fully created and the other characters are a foil to him.'<sup>3</sup> The male part within the family remains pivotal throughout Barry Hines's succeeding novels even though it is affected by deindustrialisation and subsequent unemployment. The enduring set up is summed up thus by Stephen Foster in *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, 'In the northern working-class culture, jobs, marriages, children and all the rest will partially define you.'<sup>4</sup> The family frames the whole human environment in Barry Hines's narrations with the stress laid on the prime part played by the father. The fatherly image equals that of the breadwinner and this explains the hardships endured through unemployment. The unemployed father's shame is rendered as follows in *The Blinder*, Barry Hines's first novel published in 1966: 'That knows, Len. It's a funny feeling when thi lad comes home, an' he's had to ask for money, because his father can't earn enough to keep t'house going.' - 'It's not your fault that you're off work.'<sup>5</sup>

The idealised portrayal of the father is a recurrent issue which highlights the partitioning of the working-class into separate male and female entities on the one hand, and into separate adults' and children's realms on the other. In *First Signs* the young hero vents his pride and respect for his father thus:

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 54

<sup>2</sup> Raymond Williams, *Border Country*, Chatto and Windus, London, 1978, p. 282

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p. 104

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p. 15

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 67

He liked to see his father in the queue with the other men, all in their clogs and kneepads, with their snap tins hanging low on their hips. They were heroes, and like cowboys weary from the toil, their torn and dirty uniforms told of epic conflicts fought in a private man's land away from the eyes of women and little boys.<sup>1</sup>

The bond between the generations translates in the transmission of working-class culture through the veneration tacitly implied by the following excerpt from *First Signs*: 'He heard, and as he turned from the toil of his work to the startling pleasure of his son's presence, his face took on a luminous quality which glowed through the coal dust like a hot poker glows through its sooty sheath.'<sup>2</sup> The imagery borrows from archetypes from diverse registers. The following passage from *The Heart of It* outlines the Christ-like figure of the father being attended to by his son:

He returned from the kitchen with a bowl of warm water, then knelt down beside his father and washed him all over. He had forgotten about the mosaic of blue mining scars and seared shrapnel wounds covering his body. What a brave life he had led: five years fighting in the war followed by a lifetime of danger down the pit: the Enemy Within. Cal was proud to wash his feet.<sup>3</sup>

The predominant place of the father within the familial structure is also illustrated by the description of Syd in *The Price of Coal*. He embodies natural authority accepted willingly by all the other members of the family. He embodies common sense and fairness. He also stands out by his political involvement which his son Tony discovers after the accident down the mine. This tragic event determines the whole plot of the second part of the novel. The following excerpt adopts the journalistic distance and the focalisation on the young protagonist to outline the transmission of the popular culture from father to son:

Tony was listening now because he was thinking of his father. He had heard Syd use the same argument many times, and he remembered him saying that industrial democracy was just as important as the wages battle.

But he had never been interested before, the debate had seemed too theoretical. But now, with his father trapped underground, it was suddenly relevant and urgent. The ideas had become functional.<sup>4</sup>

The imparting of the working-class traditions and beliefs through the bond between fathers and sons is a recurrent theme throughout the novels of our corpus. In *Looks and Smiles* the stress is laid on the acceptance of ideas handed down by the elders and which serves as a network for the upholding of a common culture: 'An engineering firm was making half its employees redundant. Mick knew the story well. He could guess the reasons too. He had a lot

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 117

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 94

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 94

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.131



of time to read the newspapers these days, and his father had taught him how to interpret the reports.’<sup>1</sup> The traditional male part as the breadwinner endures throughout Barry Hines narrations since in *Elvis Over England*, his last novel published in 1998, Eddie’s rueful memories reflect as he ‘remembered when he used to bring Danny and Jane to play on the swings and kick a ball around with them on the grass. Those were the good years, when he was earning high wages in the rolling mill and working hard for the family.’<sup>2</sup> Throughout working-class literature, unemployment is always presented as the main scourge for workers and Barry Hines’s accounts are no exception. His rendition is reminiscent of previous narratives such the following criticism in *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood of the impact of rampant unemployment on the working-class members’ daily lives. It features in the chapter ironically entitled ‘A Man of Leisure’: ‘Nothing to do with time; nothing to spend; nothing to do tomorrow nor the day after; nothing to wear; can’t get married. A living corpse; a unit of the spectral army of three million lost men.’<sup>3</sup> Unemployment is rife in the most recent novels of our study set from the early 1980s to the late 1990s in post-industrial England and the protagonists’ despair vents timeless grievances. Barry Hines’s male characters’ dismay is on par with William Woodruff’s analysis of his father’s dismissal in *The Road to Nab End*: ‘it was a demoralizing blow for father to find himself on the scrapheap, especially as he felt that everybody had a duty, as well as a right to work.’<sup>4</sup> The historian underlines work as the principal criterion amongst the working-class: ‘Men and women were not judged so much by what they did at home but by what they did in the mill. People respected skill. Pride of work meant a lot. Work was everything.’<sup>5</sup> The stereotype of the male breadwinner as a legacy from the very beginning of the Industrial Revolution endures as George Orwell lambasts the obnoxious effects of unemployment in *The Road to Wigan Pier*: ‘But there is no doubt about the deadening, debilitating effect of unemployment upon everybody, married or single, and upon men more than upon women. The best intellects will not stand up against it.’<sup>6</sup> This despair echoes Eddie’s plight in *Elvis Over England* as he vents his hopelessness:

We made the finest steel in the world. It made me feel proud when I saw all the countries that we used to export to: Japan, U.S.A., Germany. We were giants then and

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 112

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 69

<sup>3</sup> Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, Penguin, 1975, p. 170

<sup>4</sup> William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End*, Abacus, 1993, p. 45

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 161

<sup>6</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin, London, 1989, p. 75

I was part of it. Work's the main part of your life whatever people say, and when they take your work away, they take your life.<sup>1</sup>

The typical working-class motto sounds as heart-rending in the episode *Shop Thy Neighbour* from *Boys from the Blackstuff* by Alan Bleasdale: 'I had a job ... I laid the roads, girl, I laid the roads ... lay-bys, motorways, country lanes.'<sup>2</sup> The scenario is pitched in Birmingham in the early 1980s and appears in a set of five plays for television but the stress on work is similar. The description of Mr Walsh's job in *Looks and Smiles* remains vague as the literary distance copies the journalistic impartiality of a realistic commentary:

He was a crane-driver in the steelworks. He started work at ten o'clock and finished at six o'clock next morning. Next week he would be on the morning shift and the week after that, afternoons. Then back to nights again. They were called continental shifts, a misleadingly bland description that suggested sunshine and siestas and unhurried rural employment in the cooler hours of the day. What it really was a six-day week followed by two rest days which coincided with everybody else's weekend only once every seven weeks.<sup>3</sup>

Unemployment looms large in the two latest novels and the pathetic figure of Eddie in *Elvis Over England* stands out as a symbolic image of the economic outcast as he bemoans:

I go down to the dole. I have interviews. I go on courses. But I'm going through the motions. They know it and I know it. I'm fifty-five years old and I'll never work again!' His anguished cry momentarily drowned the bass beat from next door. 'I was a skilled man. A craftsman.' He held out his hands, palms upward for inspection. 'Look at them. Just look at them. Useless. As soft as shit.' He turned them over, revealing bitten nails. 'Can you remember what they used to be like, when I was working? They were as tough as old boots. And all the little nicks and burns from flying sparks I used to get. I didn't care though, it was part and parcel of the job. That's what you get working with molten steel.' He touched his scars on his hands.<sup>4</sup>

The debunking of the traditional male stereotype in the 1980s is a fact corroborated by historical data as Martin Francis asserts in the article entitled *The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity*: 'Sociological and psychological observations undertaken during the 1980s recession indicated that job losses created a sense of powerlessness among manual workers which was deeply emasculating at both personal and collective levels.'<sup>5</sup> The researcher propounds that this decade was the demise of patriarchal hierarchy which had been defined along the lines of 'that

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 60

<sup>2</sup> Alan Bleasdale; *Boys From the Blackstuff*, *Shop Thy Neighbour*; Granada; 1983; p. 112

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 12

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, Pp. 59 & 60

<sup>5</sup> Martin Francis, *The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity*. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep., 2002), pp. 637-652

English masculinity signified by a personal style rooted in bourgeois restraint and understatement.’<sup>1</sup>

The primacy bestowed on the male figure at the head of the household throughout Barry Hines’s narrations is illustrated by the quest for the missing father undertaken by a few heroes. The most moving instance is without doubt Billy Casper’s desperate search in *A Kestrel for a Knave*. The absence of this guardian figure is revealed by the recurrent allusions during countless disputes between the hero and his schoolmates. The teenagers bandy about insults at every altercation: ‘At least I’ve got a father to bring up, that’s more than thar can say, Casper.’<sup>2</sup> This frantic quest reaches its emotional paroxysm at the very end of the novel. The teenager, desperate because of the loss of his kestrel killed by his brother, slinks into a disused cinema where he used to go with his father. This episode juxtaposes past and present. The enumeration of short sentences, which are often left unfinished, transcribes the young protagonist’s memories by following the flow of his thoughts. The jerky rhythm echoes the suddenness of the events. The focalisation highlights Billy’s point of view and deepens the feeling of disarray. The image of supposedly omnipotent father is implied thus: ‘Billy between his dad and another man, tiny between them, down in his seat, his head just showing over the back of his seat,’<sup>3</sup> and, ‘Whispering questions up to his dad; his dad leaning down to answer them,’<sup>4</sup> and ‘Settling down, warm between his dad and the other man.’<sup>5</sup> The snugness of the scene in the cinema contrasts with the denouement as the sudden departure of the father is recalled through by the young boy’s candid testimony. Throughout the novel Billy Casper’s desperate craving conjures up the image of an ideal father which verge on a mythical entity. The teenager’s description of an ideal household is copied from his essay derisively entitled ‘A tall story’. The narration flouts the grammar and the spelling rules, and endeavours to retranscribe the vernacular. The detailed enumeration lists down-to-earth elements from the teenager’s daily life:

Once day I wolke up and my muther said to me heer Billy theres your breccfast in bed for you there was backen and egg and bred and butter and a big pot of tea when I had my breccfast the sun was shining out side and I got drest and whent down stairs we lived in a big hous up moor edge and we add carpits on the stairs and in the all and sentrall eeting. When I got down I said wers are Jud his goind the army my muther

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Francis, *The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity*. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep., 2002), pp. 637-652

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 53

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p 158

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p 158

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p 158

saide and hees not coming back. but your dades coming back in sted. There was a big fire in the room.<sup>1</sup>

The quest of the missing father sounds as a moving leitmotiv in *Elvis Over England*. The hero does not conceal his sorrow as he laments, 'No, he wasn't my real dad. But he was the only one I'd got'<sup>2</sup>, and, 'How painful it had been, having a father whom he never knew. If only there had been one letter or photograph, to make him real.'<sup>3</sup>, and, 'How he had longed to see a photograph of his father, or touch his handwriting and trace his finger over his signature at the end of a letter.'<sup>4</sup> The timelessness of the classical hierarchy within the family goes hand in hand with the transmission of the traditions within the working-class. The masculine relationship remain traditional as Eddie reflects, 'He wanted a son, his own son, to tell war stories to and take to football matches.'<sup>5</sup> The fatherly image mixes real events and embellished images of virility and bravery:

Eddie discovered that Jack wasn't his real father in the playground at junior school. A gang of boys were arguing about who were the bravest fighters during the war. Some said submarine crews, others pilots and tank commanders. Their preferences were usually determined by the roles their fathers and uncles had played during the war, spiced with film and American comic-book heroes.<sup>6</sup>

The revelation was blunt indeed, 'Your dad's a Yank. Your mother used to go out to the airbase at Wharnccliffe and go with the airmen.'<sup>7</sup> The primordial part played by family links shapes the plot of the picaresque novel and the open-ended conclusion which may foreshadow a new departure for the hero. The humoristic image of his father is on a par with his wacky humour: 'Perhaps he was still alive. Tears filled Eddie's eyes, as he saw himself hugging a leathery old critter in bib and braces on the porch of a wooden house.'<sup>8</sup> Just like Eddie in *Elvis Over England*, Karen undertakes a journey to Bristol in search for her father in *Looks and Smiles*. The young girl's allusion to moments spent as a child with her father at the cinema illustrates happy ineffable memories: 'It was tonight. It brought it all back. My dad used to take me to the pictures in the school holidays when I was little ...'<sup>9</sup> The allusion echoes a similar scene in *A Kestrel for a Knave*, in which the young hero's takes refuge in a derelict cinema where his father used to take him regularly. The allusions which crop up

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 73

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 31

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 137

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 138

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 116

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., pp. 117 & 118

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 119

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., pp. 211 & 212

<sup>9</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 75

throughout Barry Hines's narrations sketch traditional families as ideals for the upbringing of the working-class members. This image of the idealised father as the breadwinner is superimposed on that of the typically good husband with obvious analogies. The traditional family group, and especially of the couple, is redolent of Richard Hoggart's recount in *The Uses of Literacy*:

If a wife has a conscious wish, it is probably not for a husband who does such things, but rather for one who remains a husband in much the old sense, yet 'a good one' in the old sense, for one who is 'steady' and 'a good worker', one who is not likely to land her suddenly in poverty, who is likely to be kept on if sackings begin, who brings home his money regularly, who is generous with his bonuses.<sup>1</sup>

The simplistic partitioning of the working-class into two antagonistic entities serves as the backdrop of Barry Hines's novels since the chores are distinct and clear-cut. The discrepancies between the tasks are revealed as follows in *The Gamekeeper*: 'There was rigid demarcation in the Purse household. He did his job. She did hers.'<sup>2</sup> The female financial dependence is implicitly summed up thus: 'And the money he earned from rabbiting, he gave to his wife to buy new curtains or sheets, or new pullovers for the lads.'<sup>3</sup> The male figure as the breadwinner and the guardian of the household is reminiscent of the part played by Dick Hayes in *Two Men from Derby*. The play, albeit set in 1930, puts forward a similar partition of the tasks within the couple: 'He just gives me my house-keeping and keeps t'rest for himself.'<sup>4</sup> The plot also demarcates the male and female jobs outright as working at the mine is deemed much harder than running a house by one of the officials of the football club:

You're better off washing 'em than wearing 'em, I can tell you that. If you'd to go down there six days a week you'd be thankful for what you've got. You're better off filling washing tubs than coal tubs, believe me.<sup>5</sup>

The male prerogatives endure throughout the successive decades since women's work is not fully recognised as the heroin deplors in *Unfinished Business*: 'Bringing up children did not count as work. Not real work anyway. Real work was done outside the home, for wages.'<sup>6</sup> The advent of female work to supplement the couple's wages is alluded to in this novel as the young woman vents her fears: 'As soon as I got my degree, Phil would expect me to revert to my old role as housewife and mother. He'd resent me starting a career, it would make him feel inferior, especially if I was paid more than him. He wouldn't be able to stand

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 58

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 25

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p.32

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Two Men from Derby*, Hutchinson of London, 1976, p. 28

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 29

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 8

that ...'<sup>1</sup> The reluctance and the difficulty of coping with the new social parameters avowed by the male working-class members in Barry Hines's novels outline the evolution of the hierarchical bonds within the working-class households, between the spouses on the one hand and between the succeeding generations on the other. The re-modelling of the family ties is explained as follows in the article entitled *Construction White Working-Class Masculinities in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century* which sums up the joint studies by Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Judi Addelston and Julia Marusza:

The 1980s and 1990s have marked a time when the women they associate with got independent, their jobs got scarce, their unions got weak, and their privileged access to public institutions was compromised by the success of equal rights and affirmative action.<sup>2</sup>

The male members of the working-class are the main victims of the economic recession through unemployment and the resulting loss of their prerogatives as breadwinners. Their financial and moral plights and vividly outlined in the latest narratives as they vainly try to come to terms with outside factors.

The next chapter deals with the metamorphosis in the part played by women depicted by Barry Hines throughout the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **2. 3 Typical parts played by women.**

The nine novels by Barry Hines of our corpus all take place in Great-Britain during the second half of the 20th century. The feminine condition is sketched through the realistic examples, yet, no woman comes to the fore and takes the lead. All the women evolve in their male partners' wake and remain out of the limelight. The ambiguity of the part played by women is literature, and especially in working-class literature is a recurrent topic and echoes the laconic question asked by Philippe Hamon, a French literary critic, as he highlights the complexity of the heroine's role: 'Is a "heroine" only the female counterpart of a "hero"?'<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines underscores the impact of the economic and historical events from the 1960s until the late 1990s on personal daily lives and sketches the changes within the working-class microcosm. The writer outlines the changes of the relationships within the class due to the advent of feminine work and of rampant unemployment. Yet, in spite of the obvious

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 206

<sup>2</sup> Michelle Fine, Lois Weis, Judi Addelston and Julia Marusza, (In) *Secure Times: Constructing White Working-Class Masculinities in the Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, *Gender and Society*, Vol. 11, No 1 (Feb., 1997), pp. 52-68

<sup>3</sup> Philippe Hamon, *Texte et Idéologie*, Quadrige / Puf, 1984, p. 46 'Une "héroïne" est-elle simplement le double féminin du "héros"?'

alterations the rendition remains steeped in nostalgia since most male protagonists cannot come to terms with the loss of their past prerogatives.

Barry Hines's literary realism relies on the recurrent descriptions of his characters during their most mundane daily chores. The stress on the household duties fulfilled by the working-class women is reminiscent of the stereotyped picture drawn by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*, first published in 1957 and which refers to the previous decades. The clear-cut roles in the couple are cast as follows:

A husband is therefore not really expected to help about the house. If he does, his wife is pleased; but she is unlikely to harbour a grudge if he does not. 'When all's said and done', most things about a house are woman's work'.<sup>1</sup>

The typical mothers are therefore hard-working housewives utterly dedicated to their home and family. This definition certainly applies to the heroine in Barry Hines's first novel, *The Blinder*, depicted by her son thus: 'His mother was on her knees wiping the hearth. Steam was rising from the damp cloth and the drying tiles.'<sup>2</sup> The feminine chores are exactly the same in *First Signs* as the following excerpt points out: 'When Tom arrived home his mother was preparing the dinner. She had washed during the morning and the clean clothes were pegged out on two lines across the yard.'<sup>3</sup> Even though the novel entitled *The Gamekeeper* is set in rural England the wife's plight remains similar as her daily duties are explained as follows: 'The gamekeeper's wife tried to stay awake. She had to get up. Her husband would expect his breakfast to be ready when he returned from feeding the pheasants.'<sup>4</sup> A similar enumeration of feminine menial tasks is repeated in *The Price of Coal*. The family structure strictly obeys the traditional hierarchy and whilst men work outside the woman stays at home and sees to the housework. Kath embodies the classical housewife. At the very beginning of the novel we are introduced into her home as she is preparing lunch for her husband. The accent is laid on the concrete details of their daily lives: 'His wife, Kath, was at the cooker making his dinner. When she heard him come in, she took an egg out of the refrigerator and cracked it on the rim of the frying-pan.'<sup>5</sup> The subsequent preparation of the meal for her son, Mark, stems from the same stereotyped ritual. The hierarchical ranks between the different members seem tacitly accepted:

Kath came in from the kitchen and placed his dinner in front of him. Mark immediately reared up on the settee to see what it was.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p 55

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 16

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 127

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 10

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 12

‘Can I have mine now, mam?’  
‘I’ll get yours when I’ve got your dad off to work.’<sup>1</sup>

The traditional repartition of the chores is still the rule in *Looks and Smiles* as the mother washes the clothes of her son on leave: ‘she gathered up the dirty clothes and carried them into the kitchen.’<sup>2</sup> The same applies for Mick who is unemployed and living at home: ‘Mick looked at the socks and underpants and crumpled shirts and thought of Alan doing his own washing when he was away. His mother still did his. He did not even know how to work the washing-machine.’<sup>3</sup> An analogous list of duties to perform sums up what is expected from the heroine in *Unfinished Business* as she ponders ruefully: ‘He liked her to be at home, to take and collect the children from school, to keep the house clean and to have his dinner ready for him when he came home from work. And wasn’t that enough?’<sup>4</sup> It is precisely the young woman’s refusal to comply with these set tenets which triggers her decision to study as she strives to explain to her husband: ‘It’s not enough for me being at home all day now, Phil. I want to do something else.’<sup>5</sup> Her rebellion was already adumbrated by Freda Hayes’s despondent stocktaking of her situation in the 1930s in *Two Men from Derby* as she bemoans: ‘Stuck in here all day washing and ironing and cooking and cleaning. Never going out anywhere week in and week out. What sort of life do you call that?’<sup>6</sup> This feminine awareness contrasts with the so-called feminine stoical acceptance which Richard Hoggart lauds in the following passage from *The Uses of Literacy*:

Yet one can have little but admiration for the position such a mother assumes in her household. I am thinking of her chiefly in early-middle or middle age, when she has fully established herself as the mother of the family, when she comes into her own. She is then the pivot of the home, as it is practically the whole of her world.<sup>7</sup>

Lucy, in *Unfinished Business*, published in 1983, embodies a new feminine form of awareness and her subsequent attempts to change her own destiny. The main facet of the working-class member’s awareness is the realisation that the female fates differ according to the social classes women belong to. She opposes her mother’s image as a slovenly skivvy: ‘Whenever she thought of her mother, this was where she saw her, standing at the kitchen sink in a pinafore and shabby flat shoes,’<sup>8</sup> to the glamorous figure of her university lecturer’s

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 13

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 114

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 114

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 17

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 12

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *Two Men from Derby*, Hutchinson of London, 1979, p. 31

<sup>7</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 41

<sup>8</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 202



mother: 'She thought of Dave's mother in her cashmere jumper and high heels. She had been wearing make-up and jewellery at eleven o'clock in the morning. Two mothers, approximately the same age. Lucy's looked so old compared to Dave's.'<sup>1</sup> The author's political criticism of the British class system is implicit and echoes the hero's scathing censure voiced as follows in *First Signs*:

You should have told that to the women trying to cope with a pack of kids in a two up and two down. Bitter about every penny their husbands spent on beer because they hadn't enough for their housekeeping, and dreading them when they walked in drunk because that's when they were most likely to get fucked, and have another kid, and have another mouth to feed next year.<sup>2</sup>

The cliché of the good mother-com-wife who sacrifices herself for the welfare of her family is reminiscent of Arthur Seaton's laudatory portrait of his mother in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe: 'By God she had worked and hadn't had a good life until the war, and Arthur knew it.'<sup>3</sup> The notion of abnegation stands out as a synonym for womanhood in John Osborne's play, *Look Back In Anger*, first performed in 1956 and emblematic of the Literary Movement: *The Angry Young Men*. The subservient female statute is summed as, 'Rather – ordinary. What Jimmy insists on calling working-class. A charwoman who married an actor, worked hard all her life, and spent most of it struggling to support her husband and son.'<sup>4</sup> A similar position to the heroine's in *Educating Rita*, the novel by Peter Chepstow based on an original screenplay by Willy Russell, which the young Liverpudlian working class hairdresser, strives to alter by studying, 'She had a momentary inward glimpse of narrow streets, flowered wallpaper, shirt-sleeved Danny in front of the television, behind the Sun. Silence. Clichés. Grunts. Pub sing-songs, creaking bedsprings, fish fingers, washing up.'<sup>5</sup>

The image of the 'good' wife and mother uses stereotyped criteria which set the simplistic dichotomy within the feminine group according to Arthur Seaton, the hero of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe:

Instead of boozing in the Match she should be at home looking after her two kids, the poor little sods. If ever I get married, he thought, and have a wife that carries on like Brenda and Winnie carry on, I'll give her the biggest pasting any woman ever had. I'd kill her. My wife'll have to look after any kids I fill her with, keep the house spotless.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 202

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, pp. 58 & 59

<sup>3</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1958, p. 48

<sup>4</sup> John Osborne, *Look Back In Anger*, Faber and Faber, London, 1977, p. 64

<sup>5</sup> Peter Chepstow, *Educating Rita*, A Star Book, Reading, 1983, p. 10

And if she's good at that I might let her go to the pictures now and again and take her out for a drink on Saturday.<sup>1</sup>

The dichotomy between the so-called 'good' and 'loose' women is traditionally set up throughout the novels of our corpus. Billy Casper's household in *A Kestrel for a Knave* is presented as a dysfunctional family. The stress is laid on the dire conditions endured by the youngster in spite of the relatively affluent economic situation of the 1960s. The desultory part played by the teenager's mother is described through fleeting apparitions which depict bluntly her neglected outlook as the following excerpts illustrate: 'Mrs Casper came in from the hall, looking down at herself and smoothing wrinkles out of her sweater. Every time she brushed her palms down the front, her breasts flubbered underneath,'<sup>2</sup> and, 'His mother pulled her skirt on and tried to zip it on the hip. The zip would only close half-way, so she secured the waistband with a safety pin. The zip slipped as soon as she moved, and the slit expanded to the shape of a rugby ball.'<sup>3</sup> Besides, her sexual pranks are the main subject of the insults endured by the young hero:

"What's up, Casper, don't tha like company?"

He winked at the boys around him.

"They say thi mother does."

The gang began to snigger and snuggle into each other, Billy turned his back on them again.

"I've heard tha's got more uncles than any kid in this city."<sup>4</sup>

In *Looks and Smiles*, set in the early 1980s, Karen's mother is depicted in a similar vein as the accent on sordid details debunks the pose taken by the female protagonist: 'Her mother was sitting stiffly at one end of the settee looking ominously composed. ( ...) But her censorious manner and magisterial aplomb were seriously undermined by her flowered kimono and the nail varnish gleaming on her toe-nails.'<sup>5</sup> Thus, the definition of a good wife and mother in working-class literature seems timeless and impervious to historical and economic factors at large. In the article entitled *Feminism and Ideology: The "Terms" of Women's Stereotypes*, Ellen Seiter sums up this paradigm as follows:

What is ideological, then, about the stereotype of the good mother is the attribution of a particular set of characteristics – a capacity for nurturance, attentiveness to the psychological and emotional states of others, willingness to sacrifice one's own

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1975, pp. 149 & 150

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 37

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 18

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 75

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 81

desires for the needs of others – to woman's nature. According to the stereotype, most women are born with the talent for mothering; it is not learned.<sup>1</sup>

The feminist researcher deflates the innumerable examples of so-called innate motherly abnegation as she decries: 'Stereotypes of good mothers obscure the fact that the capacity of mothering is learned by girls in the nuclear family as a result of the sexual division of labour.'<sup>2</sup> The impact of traditions is avowed by the main female protagonist of *Unfinished Business* as she analyses her own life:

Decisions are not always made in a clear-cut and logical way. I did what was expected of me without considering anything else. I never felt that I'd made any decisions. They'd all been made for me somehow. I just went along with them, like everybody else I knew ...<sup>3</sup>

The acceptance of their fate by many young working-class women has been studied by many researchers and especially by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu who has compared their reactions to those of their male counterparts. Both groups are shaped by the impact of the reproduction of the habitus, yet the specificity of the feminine plight is underlined by Jo-Anne Dillabough in the article entitled *Class, Culture and the "Predicament of Masculine Domination": Encountering Pierre Bourdieu*. The breakthrough into the comprehension of the evolution of female conditions is encapsulated by the following assessment:

First, in contrast to strong marxist accounts of inequality, in the early 1980s, concerned themselves largely with class, Bourdieu does not view patriarchy or masculine domination as a singular system of economic oppression. His more comprehensive account of gender inequality has allowed feminist sociologists, in particular, to move beyond purely economic accounts towards a more sociocultural understanding of gender inequality and educational institutions.<sup>4</sup>

The early 1980s are presented by Barry Hines as a pivotal epoch for the entire British working-class, but especially for the female protagonists. The whole gamut of feminine viewpoints is vented in *Unfinished Business* published in 1983, from the heroine's rejection of the traditional female part: 'I know what it's like to be stuck at home all day like that. It's

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Seiter, *Feminism and Ideology : The « Terms » of Women's Stereotypes*, *Feminist Review*, No. 22 (Spring, 1986), pp. 58-81

<sup>2</sup> Ellen Seiter, *Feminism and Ideology : The « Terms » of Women's Stereotypes*, *Feminist Review*, No. 22 (Spring, 1986), pp. 58-81

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 107

<sup>4</sup> Jo-Anne Dillabough, *Class, Culture and the "Predicament of Masculine Domination": Encountering Pierre Bourdieu*, *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, Vol. 25, No. 4. Special Issue: Pierre Bourdieu's Sociology of Education: The Theory of Practice and the Practice of Theory (Sep., 2004), pp. 489-506.

like being in prison,’<sup>1</sup> to her mother’s blind acceptance: ‘You can’t study and do full justice to your home and family, it’s impossible,’<sup>2</sup> and, last but not least to the feminists’ rebellion:

Lucy had never known anything like it. Here she was, sitting with a group of women who were unequivocally advising another woman to leave her husband, give up her home, and start again on her own. They hadn’t even mentioned the baby, and what might be best for him! With them, Carol came first, not as a wife or a mother, but in her own right, as a woman. It was usually the other way round.<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines debunks the paradigm of male domination based solely on financial grounds. He agrees with Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of ‘habitus’ who stresses the prime impact of inherited and taught principles on individual decisions. The behaviour of the working-class females in the novelist’s later narrations illustrates this enlightenment. In *The Heart of It*, published in 1994 but set in the early 1980s, the growing awareness of the feminine pioneers is outlined with hindsight by the male protagonist who was away during the miners’ strike. The account focuses on the chronicler’s mother and former sister-in-law who came to the fore in spite of, or perhaps because of, the economic depression of the early 1980s. Allusions to the thorough feminine metamorphosis punctuate the narrative such as: ‘But whatever she was like then, she was different now. Cal felt the same way about his mother. She wasn’t the same woman either. Something significant had happened to both of them,’<sup>4</sup> and, ‘Cal found it impossible to reconcile the orator in the photographs with the skivvy of a mother he remembered from childhood. The transformation was incredible.’<sup>5</sup> The reason for the women’s change of attitude is progressively divulged by the witnesses who fondly recall: ‘In the end the women were the backbone of the strike. If it had been up to them, the men would never have gone back to work. They’d still be on strike now.’<sup>6</sup> The heroines’ parts are recapitulated in details thus: ‘It was bloody marvellous, the work they did during the strike: fund-raising, organizing the food kitchens and that. Your mother went fund-raising abroad somewhere, didn’t she?’<sup>7</sup> The tribute goes crescendo to outline a new hierarchy within the British working-class summed up as follows:

Things have changed round here, that is for sure. The people, the place. Everything’s been ripped apart ... (...)

It wasn’t a total disaster, though, and a lot of people came out of it a lot stronger than when they went in. Especially the women. I mean, look at your mother. She was

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 140

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 32

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 135

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 43

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 58

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 80

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 220

always a lovely woman, but totally dominated by your dad. She wasn't after the strike ended, though. They came out of it on equal terms.<sup>1</sup>

The emancipation of the female characters in this era is presented as a positive change establishing equality between both sexes by Barry Hines. The writer's upbeat outlook contrasts with the conclusion drawn by Martin Francis in the article entitled *The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity*: 'Sociological and psychological observations undertaken during the 1980s recession indicated that job losses created a sense of powerlessness among manual workers which was deeply emasculating at both personal and collective levels.'<sup>2</sup> The prime importance of work is recurrently illustrated by Barry Hines who draws the changes of attitudes triggered by the economic recession. The advent of the female workforce is delineated in the latest novels of our corpus as the working-class women work outside, whereas in the past only women living by themselves like Mrs Casper, did so. In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, it is Billy Casper who laconically alludes to his mother's job as he tries to borrow a book from the library: 'Well in that case, your mother'll have to sign it.' 'She's at work.'<sup>3</sup> Modern British women work like Mrs Walsh, in *Looks and Smiles*: 'worked the evening shift at a sweet factory, picking misshapen chocolates off a conveyor belt.'<sup>4</sup> She also has another part-time job: 'They could hardly afford it, but Alan's future came first, they said, so his mother had taken an office-cleaning job to supplement her husband's wages.'<sup>5</sup> No professional fulfilment is gained through these menial jobs as they are only a means to make ends meet. Karen, the young heroine, also works; she is an assistant in a shoe-shop, a job which she loathes:

'It was English that let me down at school. I wanted to be a nursery nurse but my grade wasn't high enough.'

'It's a bit different to working in a shoe shop, isn't it?'

'I'd no choice in the end, had I?'<sup>6</sup>

The jobs of the working-class heroines remain traditionally menial as the stress is laid on their dedication to their household. This tenet recalls Ellen Seiter's assessment in *Feminism and Ideology: The "Terms" of Women's Stereotypes*: 'The laudatory stereotype of the "good mother" relies on the pejorative stereotype of the "career woman" in delimiting

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, pp. 79 & 80

<sup>2</sup> Martin Francis, *The Domestication of the Male? Recent Research on Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century British Masculinity*. *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Sep., 2002), pp. 637-652

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 33

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p.19

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p.30

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 92

women's roles.'<sup>1</sup> The young mother faces the dilemma between missing work and staying at home to look after her sick child in *Unfinished Business* as she concludes: She had no choice; she would have to stay at home and look after him herself. Yes, like any normal mother would, she thought, suddenly ashamed that she had considered anything else.'<sup>2</sup> Moreover, most feminine jobs are only part-time as Pearl's example highlights in *Elvis Over England*. She is a 'lollipop lady' and a waitress in a pub. Yet any kind of work is better than none as her husband's despair reveals: 'I've got to go to work in the morning.' 'Yeah, I wish I was going with you.'<sup>3</sup> Eddie's hopelessness is voiced through the affectionate eulogy in his usual colourful manner, 'She's been a good wife. None better. A good mother too. Brought the kids up a treat. (...). Works her bollocks off. Three fucking jobs.'<sup>4</sup> The hero's admiration for his wife echoes his love for his mother, 'Don't you dare accuse me of disrespect. I thought the world of my mother. She had a hard life one way or another, but she did her best for us. All three of us.'<sup>5</sup> The change in working conditions is synonymous with the re-shuffling of the whole working-class as Beatrix Campbell vindicates in *Wigan Pier Revisited*: 'And now the sense is spreading in the old industrial communities that wives with "wee jobs" are becoming breadwinners.'<sup>6</sup> Yet, the mere fact that women work outside amounts to the inversion of the stereotyped roles and to the emasculation of the erstwhile breadwinner. In *Looks and Smiles* the scene describing Karen paying for the cinema tickets encapsulates this upheaval: 'The note in Karen's hand made Mick's position intolerable, and she tactfully crumpled it into her palm like a conjurer concealing a silk scarf. Mick turned to face her. His forehead was glistening with sweat.'<sup>7</sup> Work grants confidence and authority as the following excerpt from *Looks and Smiles* illustrates: 'She wasn't much older than Steve, but being in work gave her authority.'<sup>8</sup> The stereotyped male reactions are corroborated by Beatrix Campbell's account of her journey to the north of England in the midst of the economic depression of the early 1980s. In her essay eloquently entitled *Wigan Pier Revisited* she highlights the re-shaping of the British working-class through women earning wages. She equals this upheaval to the utter

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<sup>1</sup> Ellen Seiter, *Feminism and Ideology : The « Terms » of Women's Stereotypes*, *Feminist Review*, No. 22 (Spring, 1986), pp. 58-81

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 104

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 32

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 96

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 26

<sup>6</sup> Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, Virago Press Limited, 1984, p. 59

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 70

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., p.26

disruption of ‘the equation between the breadwinner and masculinity which had been inscribed in both the wage system and the state’s system of income support.’<sup>1</sup>

The match with the new realities of Barry Hines’s literary representation is underscored by the data quoted by Eric Hopkins in *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990*:

The proportion of women at work changed from about a third in 1945 to about a half by the mid-1980s, while the proportion of married women at work more than doubled within the same period, reaching 60 per cent by 1987, though many of the married women were employed part-time. While more and more women went to work between 1971 and 1987, the proportion of males not at work increased from 9 to 12 per cent.<sup>2</sup>

Barry Hines’s literary treatment echoes the stance propounded by the feminist literary critic, Pamela Fox, who de-constructs the apparent but spurious working-class male hegemony by bringing women’s roles to the fore in the following excerpt from *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890- 1945*:

Ross establishes that women were not only the “transmitters” of working-class culture, as in Hoggart’s view, but held a “pivotal place” in the very structuring of that culture, which she broadens to include “a compound of household, marriage, and child-rearing practices; male and female workplace culture; a broader political culture; formal and informal adult male neighbourhood institutions ... and the neighbourhood and female-centered institutions of domestic sharing.”<sup>3</sup>

The prime role of the mother as the central fulcrum of the family which endures throughout Barry Hines’s novels contrasts with the changes which the literary critics, H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight qualify as: ‘deconstructing the myth of the loving family, in this case the cliché of the self-sacrificing mother: it crumbles under the pressures of modern society.’<sup>4</sup> This ‘modern society’ symbolised by the feminisation of work and globalisation as Owen Jones pinpoints Chavs, ‘A blue-uniformed male factory worker with a union card in his pocket might have been an appropriate symbol for the working-class of the 1950s. A low-paid, part-time, female shelf-stacker would certainly not be unrepresentative of the same class today.’<sup>5</sup> Whereas Barry Hines deliberately glosses over the impact of the soaring number of working women, Guy Standing stresses this radical modification of the working class in *The Precariat*:

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<sup>1</sup> Beatrix Campbell, *Wigan Pier Revisited*, Virago Press Limited, 1984, p. 59

<sup>2</sup> Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1991, p. 208

<sup>3</sup> Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890- 1945*, Duke University Press, Durham & London; 1994, p. 43

<sup>4</sup> H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight, *British Industrial Fictions*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff; 2000, p. 202

<sup>5</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 167

(...) the demise of the ‘family wage’, a feature of the industrial age and the compact between capital and the working class. The industrial proletariat developed an expectation that the male worker would receive a wage adequate to maintain a nuclear family, not just the worker himself. This rule of thumb has gone.<sup>1</sup>

The sociological treatise outlines the re-structuring of the British working-class through the debunking of the archetypal male predominance:

Historically, young men had role models to help them into manhood. They were presented with a virilising idea. They would look after their parents, earn enough to be able to support a wife and children, and end their years as respected elders. It was sexist and patriarchal, not a structure to applaud, but ingrained over generations. Now there are few realistic role models for working-class young men to emulate that would gain them self-respect, and their prospects of being a future ‘breadwinner’ are dim.<sup>2</sup>

Barry Hines plays down the impact of the economic ups and downs and stresses the everlasting substratum which welds the working-class. The scope of the outside factors is undeniable yet the social structure is only slightly re-modelled in keeping with the subtle constant changes alluded to by Raymond Williams in *The Welsh Industrial Novel* thus: ‘Social relations are not assumed, are not static, are not conventions within which the tale of a marriage or an inheritance or an adventure can go its own way.’<sup>3</sup> However crucial the parts played by some of Barry Hines’s heroines during the succeeding strikes they remain out of the limelight and the stereotyped scission of the British working-class still endures. The heroines are just as limited by outside factors as their male counterparts.

Who are the heroes in the face of the relentless modification of the working-class? This is what the next chapter deals with.

## **2. 4. Working-class hero or anti-hero?**

What about the working-class heroes described in the nine novels of our corpus ? The novelist’s empathy with the working-class members is obvious throughout his writings and poses the definition recounted by Raymond Williams in *The Welsh Industrial Novel*. The excerpt from the lecture given on 21<sup>st</sup> April 1978 actually refers to Elizabeth Gaskell but applies to Barry Hines’s literary message: ‘my hero, the person with whom all my sympathies went.’<sup>4</sup> The French critic Philippe Hamon stresses the specificity of the working-class hero in a similar way in *Texte et Idéologie* as he muses: ‘The reification of the character amounts to

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<sup>1</sup> Guy Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class*. Bloombury Academic; 2011, p. 60

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 64

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, University College Cardiff Press, 1979, p. 11

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 5



the amalgam of his personality into his job: 'Is the hero the closest character to the author? Or the closest character to the reader?'<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's treatment of the central character follows the classical vein of socialist literature defined by H. Gustav Klaus in *The Literature of Labour*:

However, when the socialist novel matures (...) it does so, almost from the outset, by downgrading the role of the central individual hero. Instead of presenting unique individuals in extraordinary circumstances, the socialist novel tends to emphasise the representativeness of its characters and the commonness of their position.<sup>2</sup>

The debunking of the hero-image highlights Barry Hines's message as the accent is recurrently laid on the vulnerability of the working-class members. His most famous character is without any doubt Billy Casper, whose pathetic lone silhouette haunts the whole narration of *A Kestrel for a Knave*. He encapsulates the typical scapegoat and victim: 'And at the centre of it all, Billy, like a brave little clown, was busy trying to make them fit, and Sugden was looking at him as though it was his fault for being too small for them.'<sup>3</sup> The stress on his puny figure highlights his vulnerability and despair as he symbolises martyrdom. The universality of the image may adumbrate the relentless plight and demise of the working-class:

For an instant, as he hurried into the showers, with one leg angled in running, with his dirty legs and huge rib cage moulding the skin of his white body, with his hollow cheek in profile, and the sabre of shadow emanating from the eye-hole, just for a moment he resembled an old print of a child hurrying towards the final solution.<sup>4</sup>

Billy Casper's desperate figure becomes a universal symbol through the following conversation with his understanding English teacher, Mr Farthing: 'But I'm not that bad. I'm no worse than stacks o'kids, but they just seem to get away with it.' 'You think you're just unlucky, then?' 'I don't know, Sir. I seem to get into bother for nowt.'<sup>5</sup> Billy Casper is constantly the laughing stock of his schoolfellows on the one hand, and the butt for the teachers' sarcasms. He explains his plight: 'They're fed up wi'us. We're fed up wi'them, then when there's any trouble, they pick on me 'cos I'm t'littlest.'<sup>6</sup> The contrast between Billy Casper's dwarfish body and his brother's strength prompts the youth's fear and admiration. Yet the other pupils have found out the bravado and scoff at the awed respect vented: 'Tha

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<sup>1</sup> Philippe Hamon; *Texte et Idéologie*; Quadrige PUF, 1984, p. 44 « Le héros est-il le personnage le plus proche de l'auteur? Ou le plus proche du lecteur, celui dans lequel il va se projeter? »

<sup>2</sup> H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour*; The Harvester Press; Brighton; 1985, p. 126

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 89

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 105

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p.81

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 81

what! He's cock o't' estate, that's all.'<sup>1</sup> The unusual hero seems to remain the lone youth: 'The Pictures. Warm. Full. Smoky. Big Picture. Billy as hero. Billy on the screen. Big Billy. Kes on his arm. Big Kes. Close up. Technicolor. Looking round, looking down at them all, fierce-eyed.'<sup>2</sup>

Another symbol of the downtrodden is the unemployed worker who strives to cope with the succeeding economic crises. Here is the pathetic depiction of Mr Hawk in Barry Hines's very first novel, *The Blinder*, published in 1966: 'He's gone to pieces since he was thrown off work. He can't stand it, you know, Len, when he's not working.'<sup>3</sup> The hopelessness of the redundant male protagonists is a constant parameter which spans the succeeding decades. In *Elvis Over England*, published in 1998, the hero's desperate plea strikes a similar chord as he bemoans: 'Work's the main part of your life whatever people say, and when they take your work away, they take your life.'<sup>4</sup> The tutelary fatherly image is recurrently deflated by outside economic factors. The bonds between fathers and sons translate the traditional family hierarchy and guarantee the transmission of age-old working-class values. The filial and political communion between the male generations is transcribed in *First Signs* by the protagonist's mock tirade boasting his working-class lineage:

Don't tell me you've never heard of me, Renshaw, of Renshaw Renshaw and Renshaw, that well-known family of colliers, suppliers of coal by appointment to Her Majesty the Queen, and other such households of position and rank for over one hundred years?<sup>5</sup>

The legacy is not blatantly accepted as the plot of the novel entitled *The Heart of It* retraces the discovery by the son of his father's involvement in the miners' strikes in the early 1980s. His visit to his ailing father is synonymous with his growing personal and political awareness as his outlook shifts from his bitter memories of 'his father's bullying arrogance and political rigidity,'<sup>6</sup> to admiration. The eulogistic remarks uttered by witnesses shape the son's utterly new outlook: 'He was brilliant during the strike, your dad. It wasn't his fault we went back, I can tell you. He'd have stopped out for ever.'<sup>7</sup> Political commitment and action stand out as recurrent parameters of the working-class hero's definition. So is the hero the classical courageous worker who radiates charisma and moral strength and embodies honesty and political involvement? These qualities are illustrated by Syd in *The Price of Coal* and Mr

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 75

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 159 & 160

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 124

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 60

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 73

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 25

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 8

Walsh in *Looks and Smiles*. Thanks to their restraint and their probity they appear as the writer's spokesmen and convey his political and humanist message throughout his works. These two characters are very much alike and embody the working-class patriarchal image of the father, of the husband, of the conscientious worker. They both voice political commitment and fairness. The transmission of values seems tacitly accepted as Syd's son reflects after the accident down the mine: 'But he had never been interested before, the debate had seemed too theoretical. But now, with his father trapped underground, it was suddenly relevant and urgent. The ideas had become functional.'<sup>1</sup> The author's empathy is blatant and may make these characters a little too perfect even though the attention paid to realistic details is faultless. Yet, with the advent of feminine work and the deindustrialisation of Britain, the male supremacy is overthrown in *The Heart of It* as the protagonist candidly enthuses over his mother's enlightenment: 'The transformation was incredible. (...) Cal shook his head in wonderment. It looked as if his father would be polishing his own shoes in future.'<sup>2</sup> In *Unfinished Business* the heroine's father owns up his powerlessness thus:

You were a steelworker's daughter working all three shifts to keep his family going, and too buggered to do anything else. I let you leave school because I didn't know any better. Let's face it, at sixteen you were better educated than me!<sup>3</sup>

The advent of women as equals is sealed by this testimony. Besides the economic up and downs constantly re-shape the very structure of the working-class and accentuate the workers' position as mere pawns in the face of upheavals.

What about the hero from the working-class in Barry Hines's most recent novel? The term 'anti-hero' may sound more appropriate as Eddie's diverse apparitions in *Elvis Over England* are certainly more farcical than heroic. From the outset his wacky and unpredictable behaviour verges on ridicule as he turns up after his mother's funeral: 'When Eddie walked in, carrying his crimson Teddy-boy jacket and carrying his mother goldfish in a polythene sandwich bag, everybody went quiet.'<sup>4</sup> The focus on ludicrous details and the resort to exaggerations conjure up burlesque situations. One physical trait suffices to pitch the character:

Eddie was parked on the drive, putting his tattoos through their paces, when the artist called. Snakes and dragons writhed in mortal combat as he flexed his biceps. An eagle

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 131

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 58

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, pp. 205 & 206

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 18

flapped its wings, and the little boy and girl who were standing by the car watching the show, ran away in terror when he made the lion roar.<sup>1</sup>

His outfit would not be complete without Elvis Presley's typical hairstyle: 'Eddie emerged, wearing a clean T-shirt and his hair reinforced with Brylcreem in an attempt to support his sagging quiff.'<sup>2</sup> All the details partake of the fantasy he constructs to supersede reality and offer a way-out of his daily plight. Yet the results are not always satisfactory as the hero bemoans: 'Eddie was disappointed by his own portrait though. The clean-cut dude he was expecting had been supplanted at the wheel by a boozy old rocker with heavy jowls.'<sup>3</sup> Eddie's bigger-than-life personality hogs the whole stage. He surprises, he shocks, he disconcerts, he makes the readers laugh and he makes them smile. The gamut of portraits sketched by the numerous bystanders is hilarious and moving. Here is the description by his stunned son as he catches a glimpse of Eddie at the wheel of the pink Cadillac he has just purchased: 'His old man, an old rocker with thinning, slicked-back hair was grinning up at him from a gleaming soft top, straight out of Hollywood.'<sup>4</sup> On a par with the previous depiction here is how the painter, who is doing door-to-door canvassing, sees him. Instead of painting the hero's house he ends up painting Eddie showing off in front of the fateful car. The absurdity of the situation is conveyed by the bewilderment mingled with fear of the artist:

This job was more complicated... council house, rough estate and the guy didn't look like the chairman of the board. Yet he owns this classic American limo which must have cost him. Perhaps he was one of those sentimental fools who had won the lottery and vowed that his new-found wealth would never change him. But weighing up the big slob before him, he doubted it. He looked like a guy who would move into a Barratt's mansion on a green-field site out of town and have a string of American cars on the driveway.<sup>5</sup>

Another unflattering and even cynical opinion of the painter about his peculiar customer reads, 'fat gits in flash cars on council estates.'<sup>6</sup> Here is the viewpoint from another staggered onlooker in the candid words of the Scottish hitch-hiker Eddie has picked up:

He looked Eddie over: a big, heavy-looking dude with a prehistoric haircut. He didn't look like the sort you'd want to tangle with, even though he was getting on a bit. Perhaps he was a weirdo, a serial killer who stopped people in lonely places, and if they didn't answer the question correctly, he blew them away, then stuffed the body in the boot of his car.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 48

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 51

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 54

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 36

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 51

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p.52

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p.121

The portrait of the hero of *Elvis Over England* is drawn in successive touches through the different outlines of a gallery of witnesses. The young lady whose car has just been stolen in a petrol-station describes him briefly: ‘There was this big fat guy in the filling station with this huge American car.’<sup>1</sup> The skinheads he fights with in the pub depict him summarily through derogatory comments: ‘The old cunt was looking for trouble, no doubt about it. But he was a mean-looking bastard, all the same’, or ‘Grandad’, or ‘Do you think we’re scared of you, you fat bastard?’<sup>2</sup> It is this insulting epithet that makes him flare up and the verbal altercation turns into a free-for-all fight. Yet his self portrait is even more scathing and acerbic than any of the previous comments as he bitterly states: ‘And look how I’ve finished up!’ (...) ‘A booby-prize husband! No job! And a nutter living next door.’<sup>3</sup> Surly, uncouth, quarrelsome and a brawler, the colourful figure Eddie hogs the limelight. He monopolises the whole narration and his unmistakable presence is based on clichés from the popular culture. His caricature is worthy of a comics by his colourful truculence. Exaggerations, alliterations and repetitions build up the image in a humoristic way as the style adopts a literary vein reminiscent of tales told to a young audience. The protagonist voices his disillusion and his uneasiness which he ascribes to unemployment. He accuses the economic slump for all the ills and feels utterly at a loss to grapple with his own predicament: ‘He wasn’t handsome. He wasn’t young. And he was certainly no stud. He was fat, fifty-five and fucked. His pulling prospects were limited.’<sup>4</sup> He continually tries to flee from the dire reality of his plight he cannot come to terms with, and everything is a pretext to dream and to toy with personal changes. Eddie’s helplessness translates into a skin-deep touchiness characterised by extremely irrational and unforeseeable actions which grant him the statute of the White Clown in the vein of the *Commedia d’el Arte*. Dream, myth and way-out, this is exactly what his pink Cadillac embodies as he is strutting along the streets of the housing-estate:

Eddie was Elvis as he drove across the estate towards Memphis, Tennessee, and when he entered the Greyhound he was walking into Sam Phillip’s Sun Records studio to cut his next disc. He tried to maintain his role by selecting all the Elvis records on the juke box, but when he heard the opening bars of ‘Always On My Mind’, he was singing to Pearl and not Priscilla.<sup>5</sup>

Pranks and antics serve as outlets from an existence he finds increasingly unbearable and amount to an attempt at escaping from his plight. The use of humour as a literary

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 152

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 179

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p.61

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 153

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 71

component is recurrent throughout working-class literature and its specific values are summed up thus by Jeremy Hawthorn in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*: 'Ironic humour is in fact a distinctive tone of proletarian class and self-consciousness, expressing moods that range from laconic resignation to buoyant self-confidence and pride.'<sup>1</sup> Yet even the frequent resort to escapism does not assuage Eddie's deep-rooted feeling of uselessness and his despair under a thin veneer of could-not-carelessness break out at the least vexation. Unable to grapple his situation on the dole he tries to escape, a common resort by working-class disillusioned protagonists as Nigel Gray implies in the sociological treatise entitled *The Silent Majority*: 'People tolerate inhuman conditions by escaping into a dream world. While this helps people to bear the unbearable, it prevents them from changing it.'<sup>2</sup> This flight does not solve any problem whatsoever. On the contrary it even worsens the character's predicament but Eddie cannot adapt. The analysis of this phenomenon by Jeremy Hawthorn in *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century* delineates its scope thus:

Fantasying is compulsive, it has 'no poetic value, whereas dream does', and it 'interferes with action and with life in the real or external world', as well as with 'personal or inner psychic reality, the living core of the individual personality.'<sup>3</sup>

The equivocal notion of the 'hero' in the working-class novels cannot be pinned down to one item because of its variety and scope. Whose choice is it: the writer's or the reader's? Barry Hines expounds his personal definition of the working-class hero in *This Artistic Life* as he alludes to the comics he devoured during his youth to the detriment of classical novels depicting a social environment he knew nothing about:

I wanted to read about a world I could identify with, where people had to work for a living. Nobody seemed to work in literature. I wanted to read about Teddy Boys and courting and sport and adventure, and the only place it was in comics. (...)

Alf was the first four minute miler. (...) Alf carried his kit in a brown paper parcel. He was a welder by trade and he ate a lot of fish and chips. I understood all that. Alf was my hero.<sup>4</sup>

So who are the real working-class heroes? An article by Richard Benson entitled *When We Were Heroes* and published in the weekly *The Observer* on Sunday December 4th 2005 is copied in part in *This Artistic Life* by Barry Hines. The journalist analysis the reason for the

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<sup>1</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p. 79

<sup>2</sup> Nigel Gray, *The Silent Majority*, Barnes & Noble Books, New York, 1973, pp. 108 & 109

<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Hawthorn, *The British Working-Class Novel in the Twentieth Century*, Edward Arnold Ltd, 1984, p. 90

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 68

enormous success of the novel *A Kestrel for a Knave* and of its filmic version entitled *Kes* thus:

That was our history, that film.’ And it was – not the Marquess of wherever for once, but our history. And looking back, I think it belonged to that time in the 1970s when there was that working-class confidence; wages were going up, so you were getting better off, and we felt as if we had power on our hands.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines’s representation of the characters in the nine novels of our corpus delves into concrete, even down-to-earth, data which contributes to the impression of veracity. The descriptions of the different protagonists search into reality and this literary process anchors the narration into a context of truth. A sole precise detail sets up the identity of such or such protagonist, combining thus the concrete and the implicit. The descriptions of the protagonists of our study comply with Philippe Hamon’s definition quoted in *Realism* by Lilian R Furst: ‘At the level of the characters, realist discourse, always in search of transparency and the circulation of knowledge, will strive to reduce the imbalance that exists between the being and the appearance of objects or characters.’<sup>2</sup> The outlay and the hierarchy within the working-class are woven around a network which dictates the human relationships. The decoding of the popular stereotypes remains extremely traditional in the novels studied. The social evolutions are mentioned but their impact proves limited. The novels address a wide public and flout the social barriers as the writer adopts the role of an observer from the wings. The transmission, which the novelist hopes is as realistic and unbiased as possible, strives to provoke the support of the reader. In this respect, Barry Hines’s literary rendition echoes the doctrine of socialist realism which defines ‘literature as social criticism and analysis, and the artist as a social enlightener’<sup>3</sup> as Terry Eagleton recalls in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. The political message conveyed by Barry Hines is all the more potent as it is woven into the mere fabric of the narration and relies on the working-class roots of the author. The uniqueness of this position blends the antagonistic, and yet, complementary facets of the two different genres propounded in the following excerpt from *The Literature of Labour* by H. Gustav Klaus:

The following analytical distinction between ‘working-class’ and ‘socialist’ novels cannot dispel all the difficulties. To submit that ‘working-class’ is a descriptive term denoting the fiction produced by worker-writers (that is, authors still in the production process or subjected to unemployment) and by writers with a working-class background depicting their milieu of origin, is thus an ideal-type definition, but one which at least yields two criteria, authorship and subject matter. (...)

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 159

<sup>2</sup> Lilian R Furst, *Realism*, Longman, 1992, p. 178

<sup>3</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Routledge, 1976, p. 43

Thus at some stage the need for another concept becomes urgent, one which grasps the ideological quality of works. It is this requirement which the term 'socialist' seeks to fulfil.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's literary devices remain traditional in his early novels as the stress is laid on stereotyped characters whose personalities encapsulate different facets of the working-class. The individual traits are easily recognizable and strike a chord within the readership. The writer's technique remains classical and follows the parameters delineated by Philippe Hamon in the following excerpt from *Realism* by Lilian R Furst :

The author must intervene surreptitiously in an oblique manner, in order to guarantee the credibility of his information; similarly, the reader must participate in the author's referential intention and must in reading recognise a certain number of indicative signs.<sup>2</sup>

The human group also abides by set values and each protagonist fits in a niche. A few slight strokes suffice to conjure up rounded figures through the use of implicit features. These actors may differ by their personality but they certainly belong to a community. The codes which underpin the British working-class hardly changes during the decades which span the nine novels of our corpus. The hierarchy within the family obeys age-old dictates which are tacitly accepted and endures in spite of the successive economic changes. The historical events which occurred during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are rendered meticulously, especially the Miners' Strike of the early 1980s, yet the substratum of working-class values bequeathed from generation to generation, independently of the geographical, historical and social changes seems quite immutable. The author's message is steeped in nostalgia which is reminiscent of Raymond Williams's standpoint in *The Welsh Industrial Novel*: 'The abstracted categories of "social" and "personal" are here, in these specific human conditions (...) interfused and inextricable though not always indistinguishable.'<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines's heroes, or rather 'non heroes', stand out as mere misfits trapped in a new social order they hardly grasp and fail to master. As H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight sum up in *British Industrial Fictions*, each protagonist portrayed by Barry Hines could be classified, in spite of his own fight and qualities, as 'a mediocre hero', to use the expression coined by Lukacs to identify 'an ordinary weak person across whom the forces of the period would march.'<sup>4</sup> They are the harbingers of a new working-class that Owen Jones delineates

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<sup>1</sup> H. Gustav Klaus, *The Literature of Labour*; The Harvester Press; Brighton; 1985, pp. 107 & 108

<sup>2</sup> Lilian R Furst, *Realism*, Longman, 1992, p. 175

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, University College, Cardiff, 1979, p. 12

<sup>4</sup> H. Gustav Klaus and Stephen Knight, *British Industrial Fictions*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2000, p. 177



thus in Chavs: ‘loud and lower class’, most Chavs come from not well-off, working-class families on council estates, and get their money from the dole.’<sup>1</sup> The scathing depiction of the British working-class uses the same pragmatic and trivial details as Barry Hines, but diametrically contrasts with the author’s deep-seated empathy for his characters. In spite of the historical, economic and societal alterations experienced by the cast of characters during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the limitations on their daily existence remain immutable. These restrictions stem from the geographical setting as we saw in the first chapter. They also result from the set of human relationships within the social group as this part of the study illustrates. Besides these limitations are imposed by the hierarchical links within the class-ridden British society at large since none of Barry Hines’s characters has succeeded, willingly or unwittingly, in escaping from the working-class microcosm.

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Jones, Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class, Verso, 2011, p. 112

### **Chapter 3 : Social Representations.**

The setting portrayed by Barry Hines in the four novels of our corpus highlights the severe, although tacit, laws which rule the hierarchy within British society during the last decades of the 20th century. This Manichean partition between ‘them and us’ recurs throughout the British working-class literature. Although they are abstract, the notions of social segregation play an essential part in the everyday lives of the members of the popular class. They act as a yoke, just as restricting as the geographic confines and the human stereotypes studied in the previous chapters. The social representations shaped by age-old data thus complete the triptych of the social environment. But what does the term ‘them’ really mean? In *The Uses of Literacy*, Richard Hoggart proposes a definition of the group labelled by the designation ‘them’ which he completes with many concrete examples. In accordance to the simplistic and stereotyped segmentation he splits the British society into two opposite entities as follows: ‘To the very poor, especially, they compose a shadowy but numerous and powerful group affecting their lives at almost every point: the world is divided into ‘Them’ and ‘Us’.’<sup>1</sup> He illustrates this empirical explanation thanks to an array of testimonies transcribed in vernacular terms expressed by the representatives of working-class:

‘They’ are the ‘the people at the top’, ‘the higher-ups’, the people who give you the dole, call you up, tell you to go to war, fine you, made you split the family in the thirties to avoid a reduction in the Means Test allowance, ‘get yer in the end’, ‘aren’t really to be trusted’, ‘talk posh’, ‘are all twisters really’, ‘never tell yer owt’ (e.g. about a relative in hospital), ‘clap yer in clink’, ‘will do y’ down if they can’, ‘summons yer’, ‘are all in a click (clique) together’, ‘treat y’ like muck’.<sup>2</sup>

In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe, Arthur Seaton’s definition of ‘them’ gathers all the concepts thwarting his own innate rebellion as he claims: ‘Fighting with mothers and wives, landlords and gaffers, coppers, army, government.’<sup>3</sup> An assortment he completes truculently with ‘the snot-gobbling get that teks my income tax, the swivel-eyed swine that collects our rent, the big-headed bastard that gets my goat when he asks me to go to union meetings or sign a paper against what’s happening in Kenya.’<sup>4</sup> An equally heterogeneous list is drawn by the young hero of the short story entitled *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* as he slates society at large, and the people he accuses of arresting him

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin, 1981, p.72

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., pp. 72 & 73

<sup>3</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1975, p. 224

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 136

and sending him to Borstal: 'all the cops, governors, posh whores, penpushers, army officers, Members of Parliament.'<sup>1</sup>

Jackson Brian in *Working-Class Community*, a critical essay on Alan Sillitoe, proposes a summary definition of the partitioning in two antinomic even antagonistic human groups. The selection quotes the precise groups characterised by their jobs as belonging to the category labelled as 'them':

But who are 'them', this group so hurriedly labelled and so bitterly criticized? This somewhat vague term represents a motley group including policemen, soldiers, bosses, politicians and teachers. Their common characteristic is the fact that they tell the workers what to do. The dichotomy dividing the whole English society seems inevitable and unbridgeable.<sup>2</sup>

I have chosen to follow the order established by Jackson Brian's list for my study as the selection sets the diverse components on an equal footing and flouts the notions of class and of specific social groups. My report of the hated groups presents first the police, followed by the army. The addition of a group not mentioned in the above enumeration: nobility, is judicious in the third part of my analysis. The group fits next to the bosses, just before the foremen and the politicians. The last element of the heterogeneous group 'them' analyses the perception of the teachers. The crystallisation of the grievances by the representatives of the popular class adopts different ways and obeys the transmission of biases. The legacy perpetuates traditional values without any real questioning and personal examination. The four novels by Barry Hines of our corpus assert the timelessness of the prejudices in spite of the successive social evolutions as he considers the whole working-class as a homogeneous group. The sociologist, David Lockwood, refutes this Marxist tenet by distinguishing between market and work situations. Dennis Dworkin explains the originality of this concept as follows in *Class Struggles*: 'Lockwood argued that working-class life was variable, coinciding with three distinct types of experience: proletarian, deferential and privatized.'<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines chooses to overlook these sub-divisions and to depict the working-class as a harmonious whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1981, p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Brian Jackson, *Working-class Community*, London, Oxford University Press; 1968, p. 67

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, Pearson Longman, 2007, p. 40

### 3. 1 The police: symbol of repression.

The police are an easily identifiable group by the members of the contemporary British working-class as they embody the curbing of personal rights and repression. The hatred between the two social groups has always been part and parcel of their mutual relationships as the following passage from *The Uses of Literacy* by Richard Hoggart, published in 1957 highlights:

Their relations with the police tend to be rather different from those of the middle-classes. Often they are good, but good or bad, they tend to regard the policeman primarily as someone who is watching them, who represents the authority which has its eye on them, rather than as a member of the public services whose job is to help and protect them. They are close to the police and know something of the bullying and petty corruption that can sometimes exist.<sup>1</sup>

The mistrust and the loathing levelled at the police by the working-class members span the successive generations. Here is the criticism uttered by one of Walter Greenwood's characters in *Love on the Dole*: 'He jabbed the air in the direction of the plain-clothes police, their size rendering them conspicuous, standing in the crowd. He condemned them as 'traitors to their class', as 'enemies of the workers', 'servants of the boss class'.<sup>2</sup> Decades later a similar feeling of suspicion is vented in William Woodruff's auto-biographical account *The Road to Nab End*: 'In all our wild escapades, we seldom ran foul of the police. For us they had a stigma; we were brought up to distrust and avoid them. We distrusted them because they defended the rich.'<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines's protagonists instinctively adopt a similar behaviour in which hatred vies with mistrust and fear. In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Billy Casper who has already had brushes with the police is terrified of them. The following off-the-cuff dialogue between the schoolboy and Mr Farthing, his English teacher, hints at the young hero's previous altercations. The young working-class member's behaviour is based on the implicit acceptance of social notions:

'What about the police? Have you been in trouble with them lately?'

'No, Sir.'

'Because you've reformed? Or because you haven't been caught?'

'I've reformed, Sir.'

Mr Farthing smiled at him. But Billy was serious.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1957, p. 73

<sup>2</sup> Walter Greenwood, *Love on the Dole*, Penguin, 1975, p. 198

<sup>3</sup> William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End*, Abacus, London, 2002, pp. 184 & 185

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, pp. 82 & 83

Billy Casper's confidences as he feels more trustful go on in the vernacular vein and flout grammatical and semantic orthodoxy. The discourse adopts the typical accent of Sheffield by the elision of a letter or by skipping a syllable. These linguistic characteristics locate the story in the Midlands, the area the writer comes from. The accurate transcription of the local accent adds a moving touch of realism: 'An' at home, if owt goes wrong on t'estate, police allus come to our house, even though I've done nowt for ages now. An' they don't believe a word I say!'<sup>1</sup>

In a similar way, suspicion and hatred towards the police sound instinctive in *Looks and Smiles*, 'Phil noticed a police car driving slowly down the street towards them and immediately started to run in the opposite direction.'<sup>2</sup> The social climate is presented as an immutable fixture. The narration limits itself to a documentary and sports a praiseworthy impartiality as the events are reported as follows:

The boys had disappeared by the time the police car stopped and two officers got out, putting on their hats. They knew it would be pointless to chase the boys into the estate: they would be off the streets by now, and if they did make any inquiries, nobody would have considered giving them away to the police.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the narration, the suspicion is so deep-rooted that Mick takes fright whenever he has any dealing with the police, 'a police car cruised by and Mick looked up and down the road busily, as if he was about to depart, rather than just loitering there with nowhere to go.'<sup>4</sup> Similar fears are vented after the football match: 'He would be seriously hurt if he stayed down for long. He had to get up and fight his way back to his friends or he would finish up in hospital, or even worse, get caught by the police.'<sup>5</sup> Clashes between policemen and members of the popular social class are recurrent and explain the instinctive mistrust: 'Mick crossed the road before he reached the disturbance. He knew that being an innocent passer-by did not exclude the possibility of being arrested, and he had enough problems without appearing in court on a sus charge.'<sup>6</sup> An instinctive feeling of mistrust is vented by Mick as Karen suggests asking a policeman about the address of her father's flat in Bristol: 'Let's find a police-station. They'll tell us.' 'Yes, they will that. Tell us we're nicked more like.'<sup>7</sup> Disdain and mistrust are shared by the succeeding generation as Mrs Walsh's disdainful and mistrustful attitude during the policemen's visit illustrates. This call is felt as

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p 84

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 11

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 11

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 59

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p.107

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 136

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 171

an outright infringement and triggers stereotype reactions: 'She had lived all her life on council estates. She knew police tactics well and his crude ploy only made her more guarded and hostile.'<sup>1</sup> The scenario seems unchangeable and the mute acceptance from both parts sets the veracity of the plot, 'The sergeant knew better than to ask the other members of the family to confirm Mick's story. In the circumstances, they'd have sworn that he'd been job-hunting on the moon, if necessary.'<sup>2</sup> The detestation towards the police is kindled by the officer's remarks as he is leaving the Walshes:

'You should apply to the police force. Plenty of vacancies there for fine upstanding lads.'

Mr Walsh was annoyed by the implications of this remark and his tone was equally sarcastic when he replied.

'You what? I bet they're getting trampled to death in the rush to get in after the pay rise that you've just had.'

'You've got to pay for law and order, you know that, Mr Walsh.'

'I do. We pay all the time and always have done'.<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines's realistic attention to historical details is corroborated by Eric Hopkins's assessment from *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990*: 'In the 1980s the police were supported strongly by the Conservative governments of the time, who emphasised their commitment to law and order. Police forces were expanded and pay increased.'<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines's criticisms of the police's intervention during the Miners' Strike in 1984 waxes sanguine as the protagonists bitterly recall the violent events as follows: 'They were right bastards them, the Metropolitan Police. Fucking brutal they were. They used to wave handfuls of fivers at us and jeer through their van windows when they knew we hadn't two halfpennies to rub together,'<sup>5</sup> and, 'There were mounted police chasing men down the streets, lashing out at them with batons,'<sup>6</sup> and 'They terrorized the village; surrounded it. They were marching through the streets with combat helmets on and big riot shields.'<sup>7</sup>

The novelist Stephen Foster's account bears out similar evidence in his partly autobiographical narration ironically entitled *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*. The hateful summary reads as follows: 'I had witnessed that sinister shift change on the M1, the foot soldiers of the Met being sent up to suppress my people, and I was delighted to see

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 20

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 20

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 21

<sup>4</sup> Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1991, p. 259

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 110

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 115

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 115

them getting what they deserved.’<sup>1</sup> The scathing censure continues as follows: ‘But of course, the Met were southerners, on tasty mass-suppressing overtime bonuses; they were Cockney-Essex bellboys promoted into fascist uniforms. They were agents of the state. They were lowlife.’<sup>2</sup> The realistic message conveyed by Barry Hines in *The Heart of It* is corroborated by such recollections as the protagonist reports: ‘Not all the police were bastards. It was mainly them from other parts of the country that were the worst. There was no comeback for them. The local police had to live with it when it was all over.’<sup>3</sup> The recount adopts the form of a documentary through precise historical references:

It was a bastard of a place, the pit, but you couldn’t beat it for solidarity. That’s what the strike was about, you know. The miners were the only people Mrs Thatcher was scared of. She knew that if she could beat the miners, the rest of the unions would cave in and they’d be able to privatize everything. They had it all prepared. Did you ever read the Ridley Report?

Read it? Cal hadn’t even heard of it.

It was all in there, the preparation for battle. Power stations should be well stocked up with coal in case there was a long strike. Plans for importing coal and recruitment of non-union drivers for haulage firms. Welfare benefits cut off and specially trained police. They were well prepared for it and they didn’t half make us pay.<sup>4</sup>

The virulence of Barry Hines’s condemnation shows the police as mere pawns. Not much seems to have changed since the late 1950s as this comment echoes Richard Hoggart’s analysis in *The Uses of Literacy* who accuses them of repression and of being at the beck and call of the well-off:

Towards ‘Them’ generally, as towards the police, the primary attitude is not so much fear as mistrust: mistrust accompanied by a lack of illusions about what ‘They’ will do for one, and the complicated way – the apparently unnecessarily complicated way – in which ‘They’ order one’s life when it touches them.<sup>5</sup>

The mutual misunderstanding between the working-class and the law enforcement officers outlasts the succeeding decades. The rebellion against any form of authority dictates the unpredictable and often farcical moves of Eddie in *Elvis Over England*. In the following excerpt, the passage of a police-car followed by an ambulance is made into a chase at breakneck speed in a thundering din. The hero’s wacky humour grants the most futile event the aura of a universal upheaval. The narration stems from the protagonist’s point of view and obeys his whims and fantasies. The mistrust he voices in the face of any form of authority

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-Class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, 2009, p. 151

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 152

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 146

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., pp. 108 & 109

<sup>5</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin, 1957, p.73 & 74

whatsoever illustrates the timelessness of the stereotyped opinions handed-down from generation: 'Eddie walked through the sound storm without wincing or turning round. He would have gone deaf rather than give the police the satisfaction of looking impressed.'<sup>1</sup> The plot of Barry Hines's latest novel unravels against a background of laughable and unexpected developments. The social criticism seeps through the absurdity of the preposterous events. However the message outlines the continuity of the working-class grievances in spite of the historical and social changes which have reshaped Great-Britain during the second half of the 20th century. Mistrust and hatred are omnipresent as the ironical comments betray: 'Eddie was impressed by their good manners. They didn't treat shoplifters like that when they caught them in the precinct at home,'<sup>2</sup> and, 'Eddie was glad to see the back of them. He distrusted the police even when they were being polite. It was just another tactic as far as he was concerned.'<sup>3</sup> The scene waxes farcical through far-fetched vicissitudes. The puns rely on popular clichés: 'Eddie and the sergeant joined the constable at the window. Standing between them, he looked as if he was under arrest.'<sup>4</sup>

For all the members of the popular class the police are synonymous with repression, that is to say all limitations to their personal freedom. This group appears at the pay of the wealthy leading classes. The pent-up hatred goes without saying and overlaps the successive generations like an inherited legacy. Joining the police remains a last-ditch decision forced through the lack of professional choice of the school-leavers. The hatred and distrust is voiced thus in *The Heart of It* during the strike: 'I didn't join the police force to beat miners up. It's outside forces who are causing the trouble.'<sup>5</sup> Analogous feelings are shared across the whole spectrum as the heroine of *Unfinished Business* vividly sums up: 'Not to be offered tea put her on a par with the police and bailiffs.'<sup>6</sup>

The utter lack of dialogue between the different social groups worsens the biases and the hackneyed stereotypes of the grievances stated by the members of the contemporary British working-class. The next part deals with the army which is automatically associated with the police in popular imagery.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 148

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 150

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 148

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 40

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 202



### 3. 2 Stereotyped image of the army.

The army does not benefit from a more enjoyable image than the police as the two bodies are recurrently associated. In the four novels of our corpus Barry Hines explores the diverse facets of the army in the working-class imagery and borrows concrete examples from the fantasies to define this social group belonging to 'them'. Fighting for one's country seems alien and useless as Brian Seaton's scathing remark reveals in *Key to the Door* by Alan Sillitoe: 'I could be back in Nottingham earning ten quid a week at the Raleigh instead of wasting time in this hot district, fighting my pals'.<sup>1</sup> The hatred for the army is more virulent in Alan Sillitoe's *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* as the main character bitterly recalls his stint as a soldier: 'The bastards that put the gun into my hands. I make up a quick picture of their stupid four-eyed faces that blink as they read big books and papers on how to get blokes into khaki and fight battles in a war that they'll never be in.'<sup>2</sup>

Joining the army often means the only way to escape from unemployment for members of the popular class. This stratagem crops up throughout the British working-class literature and Barry Hines's works are no exception. In *Elvis over England* Eddie bemoans this solution as he watches military vehicles full of young conscripts. The story is set historically through the allusion to the end of compulsory conscription in Great-Britain. This reminder grants the truth of the scene and anchors the typical dislike voiced by the hero as part and parcel of popular cultural legacy:

Eddie thought about the young soldiers in the back of the army truck and wondered how many of them would have joined up if they had been able to get a job. He wondered what would have happened if national service hadn't been abolished just before he was due to be called up, and he had gone away for two years.<sup>3</sup>

The army has always occupied a specific place in the popular imagery as it symbolises an utterly alien world geographically and socially. It is within its structure that the mingling of the different social groups operates. In *Elvis Over England* Eddy reminisces about his stepfather's memories. The literary focalisation enables the formulation of the testimony in the indirect style as the words are repeated without any alteration whatsoever. The incisive expressions of the former disillusioned soldier are recounted faithfully thanks to the phonetic transcription. This rendering of the oral discourse deliberately does not delete the grammatical mistakes or the faulty elisions:

He remembered Jack, bitter and disillusioned after his life as a soldier.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Key to the Door*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1978, p. 328

<sup>2</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1975, p. 136

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 108

‘The army’s the university of the working-class’, he would declare, swing in front of the fire after returning home from the pub. ‘Gives you a broader perspective of life, and brings you into direct contact with the ruling class, the officers. And what a shower of shit they were, most of ’em. If they’d had gunpowder for brains, they wouldn’t have had enough to blow their hats off.’<sup>1</sup>

Jack’s disdain is echoed by Mr Walsh’s hatred in *Looks and Smiles* who adamantly refuses that his unemployed son joins the army. His veto is summed up by the laconic assertion: ‘Joining the army’s no answer.’<sup>2</sup> The opposite opinions expounded by the father and the son are as clear-cut and testify to their respective biases. Mick’s embellished view contrasts with his father’s prejudices and personal experiences:

His father was the main obstacle.

‘You always reckoned you enjoyed it when you were in, Dad.’

‘We’d to make the best of it, hadn’t we? We were called up. We’d no choice.’

‘It was all right for you, then, but it’s not all right for me?’<sup>3</sup>

The unemployed youngsters’ joining the army always appears as a last-ditch choice as the hero muses in *Elvis Over England*: ‘Eddie thought about the young soldiers in the back of the army truck and wondered how many of them would have joined up if they had been able to get a job.’<sup>4</sup> In *Chavs*, the sociologist Owen Jones stresses the permanence of this dilemma by a working-class mother’s desperate report:

My son’s twenty-four now and he joined the Army because there was nothing. His dream was to be a barman, and he went to the college, and he did silver service and all the training that’s around for barmen. And he got jobs, but then they laid him off: ‘Oh, we haven’t got enough work, we haven’t go work’.

Before the Army, the only option for her son was to join the ranks of Britain’s burgeoning hire-and-fire, temporary workforce with its insecure terms and conditions.<sup>5</sup>

Barry Hines’s *Looks and Smiles* begins with a popularisation campaign of the army in order to entice school-leavers. The criticism reads through the farcical scene rendered by the stress on trite details:

He made the introduction like a compère; pausing fractionally before announcing the principal’s name, then stepping away and extending an arm to welcome him. But when the major stood up, there was neither signature tune nor applause and he was received in silence. Disconcerted by such massive indifference, he picked up his hat from the table and fingered the badge at the front for reassurance. He poured a glass of water and had a sip to compose himself, then smoothed his hand across his hair. There

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 9

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 38

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 39

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 108

<sup>5</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 186

was a groove round the back just above his ears and when he put his hat on, the rim fitted this recess snugly like a lid on a jar.<sup>1</sup>

The talk uses all the stereotyped representations of the army and toys with the implicit notions. The commander does not make any concrete reference and builds his whole demonstration on mere allusions. The publicity hype borrows clichés to vaunt the modernity and the new technologies as the professional soldier hammers home his message through the scansion of a propaganda speech:

The major continued:

‘I know that you will have heard all kinds of stories about life in the army, both of the humorous and lurid variety. However, I can assure you that most of them will be wildly exaggerated and all of them badly out-of-date. The army has changed. It has had to, to keep pace with ever-changing technology. The army of today is now a smaller, highly mechanized force which needs efficient manpower to manipulate the highly sophisticated hardware which modern warfare demands. The standards of entry are now much higher. They have to be, because the demands of modern soldiering are not only tough and dangerous, but they are technical as well.’<sup>2</sup>

The documentary about the army acts as blatant propaganda by the choice of classical scenes: ‘The first shot was of a tank crashing out of a wood. The second, of a soldier diving to the ground and firing rapidly straight ahead at an unseen enemy.’<sup>3</sup> Yet in spite of all the alluring facets, joining the army remains a reluctant stopgap for the unemployed youngsters: ‘Anyway, even if you don’t like it, you’re not in for life, are you? I mean, three years. What’s three years?’<sup>4</sup> Mr Walsh bluntly opposes his son’s equivocations and voices his deep-rooted hatred towards the army, ‘You never know what you might finish up doing.’ (...) ‘Like strike-breaking. Demonstrations. Helping the police. I’m not having a son of mine involved in any of that.’<sup>5</sup> The army crystallise all the grudges felt by the members of the popular class because because of their part in the enforcement of law and order. This group is resented and considered at the pay of the well-off and of the government and their intervention in breaking strikes is resented as sheer treason. This grievance is voiced in *The Heart of It* as one of the characters bewails his son joining the army thus:

‘He’s on about joining the Army when he leaves school. Well, I’m not too happy about that after what happened in the strike, am I?’

What do you mean?

They were helping the police on the picket lines.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 8

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p.9

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 9

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 36

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 39

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 68

The army remains a microcosm alien to the members of the working-class. The understanding of this professional milieu is patchy and relies on commonplaces. Mick's hackneyed jokes about his friend on leave betray this immutable cultural substratum in *Looks and Smiles*: 'Where's all your medals, then?' Alan glanced down at his chest and grinned. 'Oh, I've left them back at camp. They're too heavy to carry about.'<sup>1</sup> The play-on-words about the typical hairstyle of the young soldier goes on in the same stereotyped humoristic vein, 'I see you've been keeping the barber busy.' Alan stroked his shorn head. 'Don't start on about that.'<sup>2</sup> The accent is laid once again on concrete elements which appeal to implicit common knowledge. The young recruit thus becomes an emblematic figure devoid of any personal physical or moral features. The geographical and historical setting of the novel borrows genuine data from the early 1980s. The economic crisis which hit Great-Britain and the War in Northern Ireland constitute the sombre background of the plot. Yet the stress is laid on the anonymity and uniformity of the clichés. The photographs displayed further underline the resort to stereotypes as the guileless comments by Mick and Karen translate the complicity between the interlocutors:

The photograph showed Alan and the two other soldiers standing in front of a Land Rover, dressed in full combat uniform and carrying rifles. Karen looked closely at their grim, stained faces.

'It's hard to tell you apart with all that gear on, isn't it? Especially with them helmets on. You all look alike. (...)

Mick took in all the details of the uniforms: the heavy boots, the flak jackets, the visors on the helmets.'<sup>3</sup>

The impact of the army on the working-class is lampooned in this novel with the Irish conflict in the background. The infringement is illustrated by the metamorphosis of the recruit which is analysed by his friend. The young soldier has changed, or rather has been changed, without his knowledge. The insidious change amounts to a betrayal: 'Mick had only seen him in his army sweater for a few minutes, but he thought it suited him better than the clothes he was wearing now.'<sup>4</sup> The violent combats which the fighter has taken part in are recounted with numerous gory details by Alan during his leave. The reference to a name and the display of a photograph realistically refer to war. The figure of the soldier killed in action is crowned with an aura. The summary of the slaughter teems with morbid and trite details. The victim

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 112

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 114

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 195 & 196

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 114

becomes the symbol of the whole conflict as the dialogue between the young working-class members reveals in *Looks and Smiles*:

‘Terry Francis they called him.’ (...) ‘He’s dead now.’

The dramatic build-up worked, and what had been a pleasant, off-duty snap, suddenly turned into something important. They scrutinized the smiling figure and noticed things they hadn’t seen before: his signet ring and watch, the cigarette in his fingers and the letter on the pillow beside his head. Mick said, ‘What happened to him?’

‘He got shot by a sniper on patrol. The bullet went in here.’ Alan pointed to his own forehead. ‘His brains were all over the road. He was a mate of mine. He came from Bradford. They had his funeral on television.’<sup>1</sup>

The reprisals are reported with just as many sordid and down-to-earth details. The oral delivery is re-transcribed with convincing precision, ‘We didn’t half make the bastards pay. We went like the clappers, every house in the street. No messing. We just kicked their doors in and turned their houses upside down. Everything, from top to bottom.’<sup>2</sup> The young soldier’s pent-up violence mirrors his personal interpretation of the role of the army which he defines thus: ‘That’s what you join the army for, isn’t it, to see some action?’<sup>3</sup>

The army is always synonymous with estrangement, of exile away from one’s geographical and human roots. The enlistment of Arthur Seaton’s father in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe resembles that of Eddie’s stepfather in *Elvis Over England* by Barry Hines. Both episodes take place during the Second World War. The former soldier has fought on the front in Europe whereas the latter was sent to wage war in Burma. Whatever the geographical place and the living conditions, the hatred of the young workers towards the army remains unchanged. The colourful diatribe by Arthur Seaton, the hero of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by Alan Sillitoe, could be claimed by any of Barry Hines’s characters in the four stories of our corpus:

In the army it was: ‘F\_\_\_\_\_ you, Jack, I’m all right.’ Out of the army it was: ‘Every man for himself.’ It amounted to the same thing. Opinions didn’t matter. Intelligent co-operation meant falling for a slip-knot, getting yourself caught in a half-nelson, though he knew a way to get free from both.<sup>4</sup>

The hardships endured in the army are compared with typical working-class conditions in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* by Alan Sillitoe as one of the protagonists acknowledges:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 197

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 197

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 116

<sup>4</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1975, p. 136

When someone asked him how much he hated it in the army. 'I didn't hate it,' he said. 'They fed me, gave me a suit, and pocket-money, which was a bloody sight more than I ever got before, unless I worked myself to death for it, and most of the time they wouldn't let me work but sent me to the dole office twice a week.'<sup>1</sup>

This image of war conjured up by Eddie's wild imagination does not know any constraint and resorts to clichés about the army. The information he has gleaned from his mother jostle with the commonplaces he blurts out throughout his quest for his father who was an American soldier. The novel *Elvis Over England* presents the different facets of this personal questioning through Eddie's endeavours and dreams: 'He tried to imagine the road during the war, when it was busy with supply trucks and staff cars, and Jeeps packed with rowdy airmen in leather jackets, waving and hollering at their low-flying aircraft as they roared overhead.'<sup>2</sup> Reality, fiction and fantasy add and overlap at will. His rebellion against any form of authority whatsoever crystallises into hatred towards the military hierarchy through the idealised image he has created of his father he has never met:

He stopped by a derelict barn, then got out of the car and stood gazing across the fields. He used to cycle out here when he was a boy and look over the hedge, just like he was looking over it now. Remains of the airbase were still visible then: the derelict gatehouse, the concrete floor of the hangar and the crumbling runway, sprouting thistles and grass. But when Eddie looked down the runway, he didn't notice the weeds. He saw Flying Fortresses lumbering into the air on bombing missions over Germany. Then he would stand there, staring into the sky until his neck ached as he waited for them to return.<sup>3</sup>

The army, just like the police, embodies the power of the well-off and of the leaders. For all the members of the working-class, to become a soldier amounts to treason and perjury. Geographical and social estrangement, exoticism and a way-out of dire living conditions sum up the facets of the army, a microcosm which remains mysterious nevertheless. The clichés keep on moulding a warped image which outlasts the social and economical changes. The deep-rooted enmity against the army stems from its main role, which consists in defending the prerogatives of the leading classes, that is to say the bosses, the nobility and the politicians. The description uses stereotypes which appeal to common representations of a hazy and alien entity. The next part deals with a much closer facet of working-class life: hierarchical relationships at work.

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1975, p. 14

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 86

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 86

### 3. 3 Hierarchy at work.

The prime importance of work throughout Barry Hines's novels outlines his rendition of social classes in compliance with the Manichean scission between two antagonistic social entities hastily defined as 'them' and 'us'. The author's portrayal of British classes during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century borrows from Ira Katznelson's complex definition which Dennis Dworkin recapitulates in the introduction to *Class Struggles*. It is based on 'the purely unequal structural relationship between capital and labour intrinsic to capitalism (or potentially other modes of production) as a system'<sup>1</sup>. Besides it establishes the corollary referred to as follows: "the social organization of society" which is explained thus: 'it is less abstract, involving, for example, workplace social relations, the structures of the labor markets, connections between home and work, and the organization of space , for example, working-class neighborhoods.'<sup>2</sup>

The outright partition obeys traditional working-class stereotypes which opposes the workers with a somewhat heterogeneous group. Nobility constitutes the first sub-division of this microcosm and this fuzzy group is, paradoxically, still the butt of the working-class members' hatred in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Britain. The metamorphosis of British society is nonetheless outlined in the following passage from *The Gamekeeper* illustrates: 'In the north of England, in Scotland and in Ireland, on millions of acres of moorland owned by the old aristocracy of landowners, and rented by the new aristocracy of businessmen, the shooting was being concluded for the day.'<sup>3</sup> Then I have chosen to analyse the descriptions of the bosses who, by definition, are presented as those who own and run the means of production. The representatives of the popular class add the foremen to the hated group labelled as 'them' since they are considered at the bosses' beck and call. Besides the foremen are even more disliked than the bosses as they embody betrayal of their own social roots. Lastly, the politicians belong to this heterogeneous group sketched more than described by the writer. The grievances vented by the members of the working-class depicted by Barry Hines rely essentially on the tacit acceptance of the transmission of age-old cultural values. These values constitute the substratum of the working-class, which the novelist copies and perpetrates throughout the nine novels of our corpus. The core tenets endure through the successive economic and historical events from the mid-1960s to the late 1990s. The impact of history echoes E. P. Thompson's definition in *The Making of the English Working Class*

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, Pearson, Longman, 2007, p. 4

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 4

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 76

which reads as follows: ‘By class I understand a historical phenomenon, unifying a number of disparate and seemingly unconnected events, both in the raw material of experience and in consciousness. I emphasize that it is a historical phenomenon.’<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines uses uncountable references to the Manichean split of the British society which echoes the simplistic dichotomy alluded by William Woodruff in *The Road to Nab End*: ‘In my whole sixteen years in Lancashire I had heard nothing but ‘us’n’ and ‘them’. The gulf dividing capital from labour was never bridged.’<sup>2</sup> The deep-rooted feeling of belonging to a distinct social group spans the economic changes which have affected the British society during the 20th Century as Stephen Foster claims in the following passage in *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*:

I might have been on the move geographically, but politically I remained in the same place. I knew on which side of the line I stood. It was Us (working-class heroes) against Them (all classes who were not working-class heroes). If you grew up in a manufacturing city in the seventies, it was your birthright to own a secure sense of self like this.<sup>3</sup>

The daily experiences take precedence over political theorisation and achieve the stereotyped image of the drastic partition of the contemporary British society into two opposed entities ‘them and us’. Barry Hines’s literary delineation of class refers to the implicit importance of historical events which have welded the group. It echoes E.P. Thompson’s peremptory assertion in the preface to *The Making of the Working Class*:

If we stop history at a given point, then there are no classes but simply a multitude of individuals with a multitude of experiences. But if we watch these men over an adequate period of social change, we observe patterns in their relationships, their ideas, and their institutions. Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, that is its only definition.<sup>4</sup>

Nobility composes the first sub-group of the abhorred profiteers grouped under the caption ‘them’. The novel, *The Gamekeeper*, is unique by its rural setting and by the cast of characters. The unit hastily dubbed as ‘them’ is actually embodied by a duke and the social relationships are redolent of feudal times. The scathing criticism of the inequalities reads as follows: ‘And now it was February, the shooting season had ended. The Duke was taking a holiday in Switzerland, before flying south for a month’s safari in Kenya,’<sup>5</sup> and, ‘It was grouse for dinner at the Big House, and grouse for dinner at the Savoy Grill. For George

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<sup>1</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, 1963, p. 8

<sup>2</sup> William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End*, Abacus, London, 2002, p. 406

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p. 20

<sup>4</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, Penguin, 1963, p. 10

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 30



Purse, it was chips and peas and a meat pie in a tin-foil tray from the supermarket on the council estate,’<sup>1</sup> and, ‘All the land that he could see belonged to the Duke. This was his beat, five thousand acres, and there were four more gamekeepers with equivalent acreage to police. And this was only the Duke’s small estate. His main estate was in Wiltshire.’<sup>2</sup> The censure is borne out through historical references such as: ‘And where did they get their land from in the first place, anyroad? They just grabbed it didn’t they? Or the king dished it out to courtiers and pimps and royal bastards born on the wrong side of the blanket.’<sup>3</sup> The situation which smacks of feudal times is still relevant in the 1970s as the author succinctly alludes:

In the north of England, in Scotland and in Ireland, on millions of acres of moorland owned by the old aristocracy of landowners, and rented by the new aristocracy of businessmen, the shooting was being concluded for the day, the bag collected, and the day’s sport discussed over drinks.<sup>4</sup>

The social set of *The Gamekeeper* is utterly unique as it casts side by side rural and urban workers. Even though they belong to the same class their outlooks are totally different. The willing obsequiousness of the former contrasts with the pent-up rebellion of the latter as the following excerpts illustrate: ‘He had been born and brought up on the estate. So had his family before him. He had worked all his life on the estate. So had his family before him. Henry Clay’s family were loyal servants to the Duke and his family, and Henry felt privileged just to work for them,’<sup>5</sup> and:

They had been born in the mining villages which surrounded the estate. They were both from mining families. Charlie had worked in the pits and George in the steel industry. They had poached the Duke’s land before they had become gamekeepers, and now, even though they were employed by the Duke, their early experiences and loyalties reasserted themselves. They knew whose side they were on.<sup>6</sup>

Within nobility, the Royal Family, because of its status, occupies a unique place. The narration of *The Price of Coal* decries the visit of Prince Charles to the mine by the ironic use of capital letters for pertaining personal pronouns and the possessive adjectives: ‘One of the men asked if He was looking for a job. Another replied that He could have his.’<sup>7</sup> The puns rely traditionally on physical, even down-to-earth, details which verge on the burlesque: ‘What have They ever done for us? They’ve never done a day’s work in Their lives. They’re

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 180

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., pp. 35 & 36

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 82

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 175

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 188

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 188

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 8

just parasites.’<sup>1</sup> The criticism is illustrated by historical references which corroborate the permanence of the social structure: ‘They don’t fool me, riding up and down, waving and shaking hands with folks. There’s never been a King or Queen yet who’s done a thing for the working people of this country. They’re reactionaries, they’re Tories to a man, every last one of them.’<sup>2</sup> The detestation towards the nobility is a recurrent issue as it is vehemently vented by the hero of *First Signs* as follows:

‘And what about your friend Lord shit, what did he behave like?’

‘My God, Tom! You do betray your background when you say things like that.’

‘I don’t betray it, I reveal it. I reveal centuries of inherited hate for bastards like that.’<sup>3</sup>

Throughout Barry Hines’s narratives there is little contact between the different social groups, which adumbrates the lack of mutual comprehension. The simplistic term ‘them’ musters utterly different social categories viewed as untrustworthy enemies as the hero exclaims in *The Gamekeeper*: ‘The Duke and the judges and such like, they’re all in the same team aren’t they? Everybody knows that.’<sup>4</sup>

The stress laid on work predicates the prime part played by the bosses in the hated group. The dichotomy is applied outright in *First Signs* through statements such as: ‘You bosses are all alike, you’ve no need to strike. It’s the same everywhere. We do all the work while you get all the money!’<sup>5</sup> The successive altercations between the hero and a wealthy heiress epitomise the scission into two irreconcilable entities: ‘What did you ever do to earn your money? Fuck all! You were born rich and you married rich. You’ve never had to lift a finger in your life,’<sup>6</sup> and, ‘Because we’re natural enemies.’-‘Like the mongoose and the snake?’<sup>7</sup> Even though this encounter takes place in Italy the dichotomous limits of the classes remain unchanged. The lack of understanding between the representatives of the antagonistic classes is sarcastically summed through the following dialogue:

‘They were all unlucky.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Having to work down there.’

‘Nobody forced them down;’

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.46

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 48

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 40

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 83

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 233

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 41

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 52

‘No, they should have lived off their royalties and dividends. They should have flown to the Mediterranean and bought a villa and a beach, and got some sun on their backs.’<sup>1</sup>

The rift between the working-class and ‘them’ seems immutable since even the definitions for the term work thoroughly as the heated argument in *First Signs* unravels as follows:

My family didn’t build up one of the largest breweries of the country just by chance you know. They built it by generations of damned hard slog.’

‘I’ll tell you how your wealth was built, Helen. It was built on the backs of the working class.’ (...)

‘The Industrial North and Midlands are covered with Friars’ Houses. The pub at the top of the street at home is a Friars’ House. Friars made their money from the workers; because their jobs in the factories and pits were so foul, and their houses so cramped and sordid, they had to forget it all for a few hours and get blind drunk on cheap ale.’<sup>2</sup>

No physical description of foremen or bosses appears in the four novels of our study. The sole real boss features in *A Kestrel for a Knave*. The mistrust between the different social classes is made obvious from the outset through the shopkeeper’s accusations against Billy Casper: ‘They said, you’ll have to keep your eyes open now, you know, ’cos they’re all alike off that estate. They’ll take your breath if you’re not careful.’<sup>3</sup> This novel, set in the late 1960s, hints at the relative economic prosperity of the era. Billy Casper is sure of finding a job as soon as he leaves school. The narration nonetheless draws the traditional limits, as the only job he can aspire to, is working down the mine, as his brother threatens: ‘Another few weeks lad, an’tha’ll be getting up wi’ me.’<sup>4</sup> A bleak perspective which the teenager refuses bluntly in spite of the exhortations by the career officer:

‘Well if nothing I’ve mentioned already appeals to you, and if you can stand a hard day’s graft, and you don’t mind getting dirty, then there are good opportunities in mining ...’

‘I’m not goin’ down t’pit.’

‘Conditions have improved tremendously...’

‘I wouldn’t be seen dead down t’pit.’<sup>5</sup>

Billy Casper is aware that his professional career is limited to doing a manual and menial task as he states despondently: ‘I’d be all right working in an office, wouldn’t I? I’ve a

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 58

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 58

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 12

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p.8

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p.139

job to read and write'.<sup>1</sup> He expresses a similar realistic disillusion to his English teacher: 'What kind of job are you after?' 'I shan't have much choice shall I? I shall have to take what they've got.'<sup>2</sup> The dialogue echoes the despair voiced by the school-leaver in *First Signs*: 'Where are you going to work, Mary?' 'I don't know yet. Anyway what's it matter? A job's a job, isn't it?'<sup>3</sup> Whatever the economic situation the only jobs attainable by Barry Hines's protagonists are menial dead-end ones since the rift within British society appears immutable. Barry Hines's works span the consecutive economic ups and downs during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the writer succeeds in outlining the foregone demise of the mining industry and the advent of unemployment in *The Price of Coal* published in 1979:

Do you know that a lad leaving school today will have to learn three new trades in the course of his working life? It's not like it used to be you know, when a lad could train to be a bricky, and still be laying bricks when he hung his trowel up at sixty-five.<sup>4</sup>

The deindustrialisation of Britain is tantamount to the disappearance of traditional occupations as the redundant workers do menial odd jobs to make ends meet in *The Heart of It* published in 1994:

I didn't know you were a security guard.  
I wasn't. I only started on Monday. (...) The taxi-driving went for a burton as soon as Kenny came back. They've cut my hours at the hotel, so when this job came up, I thought I'd better take it. Beggars can't be choosers, as they say.<sup>5</sup>

Barry Hines's rendition of the contemporary British society shows the schism between the different social groups as unbridgeable. The dichotomy between 'them' and 'us' complies with the Marxist orthodoxy which equates class with the social relations of production. The entity labelled as 'them' constitutes a heterogeneous group which recalls W. G. Runciman's definition in *How Many Classes are there in Contemporary British Society?* in the following statement: 'there are seven classes in British society, an upper class, three middle classes (upper, middle, and lower), two working classes (skilled and unskilled) and an underclass.'<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines's literary rendition refutes this categorisation as the scission remains binary. The debunking of such a rigid social set is encapsulated by the following excerpt from *Class Struggles* by Dennis Dworkin which refers to: 'the 'Hope-Goldthorpe occupational scale,'

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 138

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p.84

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 166

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.19

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 217

<sup>6</sup> W.G. Runciman, *How Many Classes are there in Contemporary British Society ?* *Sociology* 1990 24 : 377.  
Online version at <http://soc.sagepub.com/content/24/3/377>

which recognized seven classes. Two categories of professionals and three working-class ones served as bookend for three others: white-collar workers, the self-employed, and lower-grade technicians and foremen.’<sup>1</sup>

In Barry Hines’s novels set in Britain, the only representatives of the antagonistic ‘them’ whom the protagonists meet are the foremen and the managers of the mine in *The Price of Coal*. The accident which constitutes the pivotal event of the novel exacerbates further the deep-rooted mistrust between the two social groups. The foremen are only considered at the bosses’ beck and call and to forestall their permanent supervision any sly trick is permitted: ‘Bob Richards had come up unheard behind them. Being a conscientious official, he wore rubber soled boots exclusively for this purpose.’<sup>2</sup> This hostility is omnipresent and affects the slightest move by the staff who constantly remain on the alert: ‘As soon as they heard the tapping of the officials’ sticks they began to work faster, and when the officials reached them they were working hard.’<sup>3</sup> In *Looks and Smiles* Mrs Walsh’s vents similar mistrust as she complains: ‘If that supervisor says one more word to me I’ll throttle her. I’m sick of her, on at us all the time.’<sup>4</sup>

Alan Sillitoe depicts a similar hierarchy at work and the same resulting resentment in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. The fiery hero, Arthur Seaton, scoffs at the so-called traditional working-class solidarity and vindicates his individualist anarchism:

So you earned your living in spite of the firm, the rate-checker, the foreman, and the tool-setters, who always seemed to be at each others’ throats except when they ganged up at yours, though most of the time you didn’t give a sod about them but worked quite happily for a cool fourteen nicker, spinning the turret to chamfer in a smell of suds and steel, actions without thought so that all through the day you filled your mind with vivid and more agreeable pictures than those about.<sup>5</sup>

Alan Sillitoe refutes the working-class solidarity which is extolled in countless working-class narrations and recurrently hints at the jealousy between colleagues. In *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* the hero’s resentment singles out and targets Robboe, his foreman. The aversion stems from the hierarchical so-called superiority of course, but especially on the supervisor’s change of social status which is felt as a betrayal:

Arthur and Robboe tolerated each other. The enemy in them stayed dormant, a black animal stifling the noise of its growls as if commanded by a greater master to lie low,

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<sup>1</sup> Dennis Dworkin, *Class Struggles*, Pearson, 2007, p. 41

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 62

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp.71 & 72

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 19

<sup>5</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1958, pp. 32 & 33

an animal that had perhaps been passed on for some generations from father to son on either side.<sup>1</sup>

The abhorred image of the foreman who has repudiated his social origins for mercantile gain crops up throughout working-class literature. Dermot Bolger does not depart from this tradition in *Night Shift* as he retraces his hero's trajectory from being a menial worker to a foreman. His pitiable predicament reads as follows, 'Poor old Duckarse is harmless. He's landed with the worst of both worlds. He's no longer one of us and he will never be one of them.'<sup>2</sup> The ambiguous statute of the foremen is rendered by W.C. Runciman in the article entitled *How Many Classes are there in Contemporary British Society?*, as he ponders:

In the case of foremen working on the shop-floor, it is true that they exercise a measure of control over part of the process of production. But although this is clearly enough to place them in the "skilled" rather than the "unskilled" working-class, it is not enough to place them above them.<sup>3</sup>

Concurrently, Barry Hines's depiction of the foreman in *The Price of Coal*, voices his humanism since he underlines the trickiness of the situation wedged between the bosses and the workers. Ken Taylor vents his bitterness and complaints about the constant harassment from his bosses: 'It's all right for you, you irresponsible young bugger, there's nobody on your back all the time.'<sup>4</sup> The race to increase productivity flouts the safety regulations is a well-known fact as the miners confide after the disaster: 'No, but we know that Ken Taylor was under pressure from Forbes to get that face working again though, don't we?'<sup>5</sup> A similar censure of the increase of productivity at any cost is evoked in the most recent novel of our corpus: *Elvis Over England*. Different times and professional environment but the terms of the message of the writer outlast the changes. The row between Eddie and a lorry driver, he accuses of having cut him up, waxes burlesque. The colourful style dotted with swearwords and the hackneyed jokes eventually seal the settling of the disagreement between the opponents:

'Cost cutting, isn't it? It's the same everywhere.'

'And they don't care a fuck about safety. I came back from a job on the continent last week –Holland and Germany – and drove for ten cays without legal

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, W.H. Allen and Co. Ltd, London, 1958, pp. 42 & 43

<sup>2</sup> Dermot Bolger, *Night Shift*, Penguin, London, 1985, p. 20

<sup>3</sup> W.G. Runciman, *How Many Classes are there in Contemporary British Society ?* *Sociology* 1990 24 : 377. Online version at <http://soc.sagepub.com/content/24/3/377>

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.107

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 130

stops. I mean, I didn't run bent because I wanted to, I'd no choice if I wanted to keep my job.'<sup>1</sup>

The numerous wacky and humorous puns of Barry Hines's latest novel contrast with the stark depiction of similar harsh relationships at work in *Looks and Smiles* since women have to endure the same hardships at work as their male counterparts as Mrs Walsh bemoans: 'If that supervisor says one more word to me I'll throttle her. I'm sick of her, on at us all the time.'<sup>2</sup> Besides the forthcoming deindustrialisation of Britain is outlined by the main protagonist, Mr Walsh, who works for the steel industry. The following excerpt outlines the soaring unemployment in Britain and the advent of globalisation:

He was too concerned about his own problems at work, where uncertainty about the future of the steel industry was causing endless speculation. Some said that they were closing down and the work was being shifted to a newer, more profitable plant on the coast. Others said that all the loss-making sides of the industry were being closed down and the profitable sections sold back to private firms. And a few extremists said that all this was inevitable, especially now that we were in the Common Market; and that the industry was being deliberately run down. There would soon be no heavy industry left in the country, they said, and England would be used as a finishing shop and a warehouse for goods produced elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Analogous relationships and rampant unemployment constitute the backdrop of the very last scene of *Looks and Smiles*. Barry Hines realism shows the bare facts without any comment as the open-ended novel ends: 'Next morning, Karen went back to work even though she had hardly slept. She daren't take any more time off as the staff had been repeatedly warned about absenteeism. Hundreds of girls would be glad of their jobs, the supervisor had said.'<sup>4</sup>

As the protagonists of Barry Hines's novels hardly ever meet representatives from the social group labelled by the pronoun 'them' the images conjured up by both sides are steeped in clichés. For most workers the press is just propaganda, as the hateful diatribe by the distraught woman whose husband is still trapped down the mine highlights in *The Price of Coal*: 'You make me poorly you lot. You come up here, writing sob stories, reckoning to sympathize, but you don't care a damn really, do you?'<sup>5</sup> Her incisive censure goes on as she accuses them of partiality: 'You weren't willing to write sob stories about us in the '72 and

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp. 104 & 105

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 19

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 38

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 201

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p.149

'74 strikes were you? You didn't want to come to our houses then. ... You just tell lies, that's all and I don't want anything to do with you.'<sup>1</sup>

The press as a means of propaganda at the beck and call of the politicians and of the bosses is also decried in *Looks and Smiles*. The message is conveyed indirectly by the interpretation of a newspaper article which Mick Walsh analyses and debunks argument after argument. The gap between the point of view expressed by the journalists and that advocated by the workers is clarified by the explanations inserted into brackets: 'According to the papers, the unions were to blame for all the economic ills of the country.'<sup>2</sup> The media appear as a hazy entity which the young protagonist specifies as follows: 'That's what they all said; the television, the papers, the radio... They were always going on about the economic situation, or the world recession, but nobody ever explained what it meant!'<sup>3</sup>

The modern segmentation, even fragmentation, of the contemporary working class is sketched by Thomas Dunk in the article entitled *Remaking the Working Class: Experience, Class Consciousness, and the Industrial Adjustment Process* as follows:

Workers who once may have shared a consciousness, however weak, based on relationships with a common employer, union membership, or occupation are shuffled into new categories: those who can let go versus those who cannot; those who can adapt versus those who cannot; those who succeed versus those who fail.<sup>4</sup>

This layout of social strata contrasts with the traditional Manichean divide between 'them and us' implicitly enunciated by Barry Hines throughout his narratives. Even though the economic changes are alluded to through accurate historical details the writer abides by the nostalgic image of an enduring working-class identity and solidarity. The author's outlook contrasts with Eric Hopkins's analysis in *The Rise and Decline of the English Working Classes 1918- 1990*. The historian qualifies the following modifications within the working class: 'the reduction in working class political and industrial authority, the changed patterns of employment and economic status, the new instability of family life, and the change of image'<sup>5</sup> image'<sup>5</sup> as the diverse facets of its decline, as the title of the book implies. This bleak conclusion differs from Barry Hines's pervading faith in enduring working class solidarity and pride.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 150

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p.113

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 144

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Dunk, *Remaking the Working Class : Experience, Class Consciousness, and the Industrial Adjustment Process*, *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Nov., 2002), p. 896

<sup>5</sup> Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the Working Classes 1918-1990. A Social History*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1991, p. 278



The next group under scrutiny is the butt of these age-old clichés since the teachers embody a conspicuous facet of this loathed social hierarchy.

### **3. 4 The teachers.**

British society stands out as a structure partitioned into separate social classes throughout working-class literature. Education plays a crucial part in the quest for social ascension. Yet the reactions towards schooling are contradictory as some consider it as a way of improving one's destiny whereas others denigrate it outright. Richard Hoggart describes these two behaviours in *The Uses of Literacy* by resorting to the use of concrete examples from his own experience: 'That minority who became conscious of their class-limitations and take up some educational activity - so as to 'work for their class' or 'improve themselves' – tend to be ambiguously regarded.'<sup>1</sup> The arguments evoked underline the contradictory points of view as on the one hand: 'The respect for the 'scholar' (like the doctor and the parson) to some extent remains' and yet:

Parents who refuse, as a few still do, to allow their children to take up scholarships are not always thinking of the fact that they would have to be fed and clothed for much longer; at the back is this vaguely formulated but strong doubt of the value of education. That doubt acquires some of its force from the group-sense itself: for the group seeks to conserve, and many impede an inclination in any of its members to make a change, to leave the group, to be different.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of education is a recurrent issue in Barry Hines's works, all the more so since he has been a teacher himself. The writer reproduces the traditional 'them and us' dichotomy in the nine novels of our corpus which span the last decades of the 20th century and retrace the evolutions within the British school system. His testimony in his partly-autobiographical recount entitled *This Artistic Life* outlines his personal experience as a PE teacher: 'I didn't want to be a teacher. To my mind they were on a par with the police, agents of repression. No, it just seemed like a very pleasant way of perpetuating my adolescence.'<sup>3</sup> In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, the description of the education system is steeped in the past as the caricatural headmaster of the school attended by Billy Casper bemoans the fact that education has not improved human nature in the least. His diatribe compares the material living-conditions of the popular classes in the 1930s with those in the 1960s and denounces the nascent consumer society. It is precisely the concept of mass consumption that he accuses of all the current social ills:

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 84

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 84

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 86

I can understand why we had to use it (the cane) back in the 'twenties and 'thirties. Those were hard times; they bred hard people, and it needed hard measures to deal with them. But those times bred people with qualities totally lacking in you people today. They bred people with respect for a start. (...)

But what do I get from your lot? A honk from a greasy youth behind the wheel of some big second-hand car. Or an obscene remark from a gang –after they've passed me. (...)

No guts ... No backbone ... you've nothing to commend you whatsoever. You're just fodder for the mass media !<sup>1</sup>

Billy Casper stands as the typical scapegoat and is the butt of the teachers and the other pupils alike. He vents his feeling of hopelessness as he underlines this unbridgeable lack of communication between the working-class pupils and the teachers: 'They're not bothered about us, just because we're in 4C, you can tell, they talk to us like muck. They're allus callin' us idiots, an' numbskulls, an' cretins, an' looking at their watches to see how long it is to t'end o' lesson. They're fed up wi'us.'<sup>2</sup> Yet despite this complicity between Billy and Mr Farthing, his English teacher, some barriers remain unbridgeable: 'What's the matter, wouldn't it do your reputation any good to be seen travelling with a teacher?'<sup>3</sup> The utter lack of communication between the working-class and the teaching profession is voiced by the hero in *The Gamekeeper* as follows: 'Parents, especially mothers, no matter what the circumstances, should keep away from school.'<sup>4</sup> He vents his disdain for intellectual work through his virulent comments about his son's teacher: 'What's she know, anyroad? She's only a kid. Straight from school to college, then back into school. Nine 'til four and three months' holiday a year. She doesn't know she's born.'<sup>5</sup> The chasm between the different social groups is recurrently alluded to in *First Signs* as Tom Renshaw resents the breach with his working-class roots: 'Do me a favour, Roy, and stop calling me, sir. We were both born in the same street, our dads worked at the same pit. If I was a plumber or a joiner you'd be calling me Tom.'<sup>6</sup> The partitioning of the British society is humorously outlined in the narrative thus: 'In fact, I bet some kids think that teachers are not born. They think they're incubated as adults down in the boilerhouse somewhere, fully equipped with gown and chalk,'<sup>7</sup> and, 'That's the trouble with you teachers, you shut yourselves up behind them school walls so long that you've no idea what the public thinks, you haven't got a clue what's

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 56

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 83

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 120

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 22

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 66

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 197

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 200

going off. You're like bloody hermits stuck in there.'<sup>1</sup> The world of the manual workers and that of the academics are two entities apart and the plot of *Unfinished Business* relates the working-class heroine's discovery. The social and intellectual barriers are hilariously sketched in the following encounter between the atypical student's husband and one of the lecturers at a party:

His introduction to Dr Halfyard, the Reader in English, was a masterpiece of incomprehension. 'A welder!' Dr Halfyard repeated, making it sound as improbable as the handbag in *The Importance of Being Earnest*. 'How fascinating.' But his fascination only extended to asking Phil where he worked, before wandering away to find a refuge in more familiar literary topics, preferably Wyatt and other poets of the English Renaissance.<sup>2</sup>

Education as a means to improve oneself is a recurrent topic in working-class literature and many of Barry Hines's protagonists voice this optimism. It is the case in his very first novel set in the early 1960s, *The Blinder*, as the parents of the prodigy footballer continuously advise him to go on studying: 'I think you'll be better off going to University and getting a degree before you start thinking along those lines. There'll be plenty of time afterwards,'<sup>3</sup> and, 'He wants to go to University so that he can get a good job afterwards.'<sup>4</sup> A similar choice between further education and professional sports is sketched in *First Signs* by a proud mother: 'But our Roy's got brains. He could get G.C.E.s and things if he wanted to. He could get his exams and go to college. I mean, once he'd got his qualifications he could always play then, couldn't he?'<sup>5</sup> The working-class scornful stance about education stems from the social segregation it perpetuates. The partitioning of the British Society is illustrated by the segmentation between the manual workers qualified as 'blue collars' and 'white collars'. In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, the pragmatic advice given by the mother to her son before the meeting with a career adviser symbolises the fallacious hope in education as a means for social improvement: 'Tell him that you're after a good job, an office job, summat like that.'<sup>6</sup> An ambitious outlook with contrasts with Billy Casper's realism: 'I'd be all right working in an office, wouldn't I? I've a job to read and write.'<sup>7</sup> Social improvement amounts to a job as a civil servant in an office. Improvement thanks to further education is the reason why Lucy, the heroine of *Unfinished Business* decides to attend university:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 236

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 157

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 18

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 21

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 209

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 135

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 138

‘Well, what good will it do to you, going to university?’  
 (...) ‘I was thinking of doing an English degree.’  
 ‘And what use will that be? They’re sacking teachers left, right and centre just now.’  
 ‘Who says I want to be a teacher?’  
 ‘What else can you be with an English degree? I mean, it’s not even useful, not like computer studies, or science, or something like that.’<sup>1</sup>

The plot of this novel is reminiscent of *Educating Rita* by Peter Chepstow and his somewhat atypical hairdresser who sums her expectations for starting a university course as follows: ‘But when I asked my mother why she was cryin’, she said, “There must be better songs to sing than this.” And I thought – that’s what I’m trying to do, aren’t I? Sing a better song ... And that’s why I came back. And that’s why I’m staying.’<sup>2</sup> Diplomas also appear as a means to better one’s life to Mick Walsh’s parents as their faith and actual commitment are evoked thus in *Looks and Smiles*:

For five years at school they had been told they would need some qualifications; and now they had got some. The necessity of their acquisition had never been questioned, but without them they would undoubtedly fail. Their futures would be bleak.

And their parents agreed. Alan’s mother and father had been so impressed by the school’s insistence (and they should know, Mrs Wright had said), that they had allowed him to stay for an extra year to try for better grades. They could hardly afford it, but Alan’s future came first, they said, so his mother had taken an office-cleaning job to supplement her husband’s wages.

Now here they were. A late September afternoon. Both qualified and approaching another factory gate.<sup>3</sup>

The vain search for a job in the face of the dire recession of that period dashes the youngsters’ hopes who give vent to their grievances: ‘You what! I’m not doing that! I want a trade. What’s the point in taking exams and getting qualifications and then going into a dead-end job like that? It’s a waste of time, isn’t it?’<sup>4</sup> The gap between the education system and the job market proves nonsensical as the heterogeneous school subjects are listed thus: ‘What was the point in being a labourer when you had obtained CSE Grade 2 in Religious Education, Humanities and Rural Studies?’<sup>5</sup> A similar ironical comment is uttered by the interviewees in *Looks and Smiles*: ‘Him who’s just gone in’s got six O’Levels.’ ‘Bloody hell. What are they interviewing for, brain surgeons?’<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines’s censure of the ineptitude of the school system in the face of the rampant unemployment of the early 1980s reads through the Mick

<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, pp. 12 & 13

<sup>2</sup> Peter Chepstow, *Educating Rita*, A Star Book, Reading, 1983, p. 62

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p.30

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 16

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 30

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 130

Walsh's numerous visits to the job centre. The uses of italics and bold capitals convey the author's condemnation by the minute description of the array of incongruous leaflets:

He picked up a newspaper called Youth Opportunities Underway. The headline read: WHO GOES WHERE? and underneath it, a photograph showed an optimistic-looking group of school-leavers, standing outside a Careers Office. The articles inside the paper were optimistic too, with success stories featured on every page. Two outstanding examples being, a pop star who had risen FROM EAST END DOCKLAND TO INTERNATIONAL ACCLAIM, and Pauline Sheptone who, after four years working in a pet shop, had become an assistant lion-tamer.<sup>1</sup>

The enumeration of far-fetched jobs goes on in the same literary vein to underline the burlesque of the scene and to denounce the propaganda. The writer's message is conveyed through the ridiculous choice of the supposedly available jobs for the school-leavers:

Mick did not know so many jobs existed and he had no idea what some of them meant. He picked up number 72, 'If I were a PRINTER (COMPOSITOR)', and read it, then number 36, 'If I were a PUNCH-CARD MACHINE OPERATOR', and read that. A boy joined him at the table and pointed incredulously at number 7, 'If I were a COWHAND'.<sup>2</sup>

The inadequacy of the school curriculum is lampooned for being too academic as the young school-leavers cannot find work in *The Price of Coal*: 'What's he doing down the pit then, if he knows Latin?' - 'He didn't do it for long. He dropped it as soon as he could. Anyway, he didn't have much choice, did he? You need seven GCEs to get a job sweeping up these days.'<sup>3</sup> The uselessness of the diplomas granted at a discount and consequently with no professional value is bitterly castigated by the parents of the young victims of the mine accident: 'Anyway, he didn't have much choice with his qualifications did he? Two CSEs in Rural Studies and Art.'<sup>4</sup> Alan Bleasdale highlights the depreciation of diplomas in a similar way in *Moonlighter*, one of five plays written for television in 1983. The dire economic recession of the early 1980s serves as the backdrop of the hero's fruitless endeavours to find work as he bemoans: 'Y' need nuclear physics t'be a binman these days, dad.'<sup>5</sup> The members of the working-class denigrate the inappropriate curriculum. In *Elvis Over England*, Eddie castigates the showy appellations to qualify these training courses which he deems useless. The change of names only tries to conceal the failures of education and the professional

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp. 13 & 14

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 14

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, pp. 17 & 18

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p.146

<sup>5</sup> Alan Bleasdale, *Moonlighter*, Granada Publishing Ltd, London, 1983, p. 68

apprenticeship: 'It wasn't cookery. It was Domestic Science.' 'And it was Home Economics when our Jane was at school. They're all the same thing with jazzed-up names'.<sup>1</sup>

The supposed worsening of the children's academic level is alluded to recurrently through derogatory comments from the adults. In the following extract from *Looks and Smiles*, the officer mocks the stuttering reading of the Oath of Allegiance by Alan during the ceremony: 'Alan faltered in several places, as if he was having difficulty reading the words. (Bloody comprehensive-school illiterate, the captain complained to a fellow officer over drinks that evening, he couldn't even read the damned oath.).'<sup>2</sup> A caustic and hasty criticism toned down by the recourse to literary internal focalisation which reveals the young character's point of view follows: 'But he could. The light from the window opposite was reflecting on the glass covering the oath, and obscuring some of the lines behind it.'<sup>3</sup> Mick is the victim of a similar bantering contempt from a secretary during a job interview: 'It was true, then, what she had read about falling standards in schools. If he was on the short list, what had the others been like?''<sup>4</sup> The failure of the British school system is underlined by Tom Renshaw, a teacher from the working-class, in *First Signs* thus:

Do you know, we're not touching the majority of kids in our schools, we're not getting anywhere near them. All we're concerned with is the academic minority. The rest just trail along in their wake, following diluted academic syllabuses which are completely irrelevant to their lives.<sup>5</sup>

This censure is reminiscent of Stephen Forster's blunt characterisation in *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*: 'Those in A took a few CSEs; those in B, C and D took no exams at all; they were 'factory fodder'.<sup>6</sup> According to this chart education reproduces, and even exacerbates, the pre-existing rift between the social classes. This predicate is lampooned by the two French sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron in *La Reproduction*, in 1970 as they state: 'Inequalities in front of selection and inequalities of selection.'<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines voices this condemnation in *First Signs* thus: 'Education only reflects the society we live in, it doesn't change it. The whole system is geared to keep the power in the hands of the minority, where it's always been.'<sup>8</sup> The dismal conclusion is immediately offset by the author's political and humanist solution: 'Only when

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 29

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 42

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 42

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 132

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 114

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p. 33

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu et Jean-Claude Passeron; *La Reproduction*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1970, p. 90 ('Inégalités devant la sélection and inégalités de sélection.')

<sup>8</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 114

you've got a decent society will you get a decent education system, until then you're just fiddling.'<sup>1</sup> The novelist lampoons the education system in *This Artistic Life* by alluding to his personal experience: 'Like the public school, the grammar school exists to perpetuate the class divisions within our society. They are middle-class institutions which try to seduce the working-class student into their ranks. They failed with me.'<sup>2</sup>

Michael Collins lampoons the part played by education in betterment. In *The Likes of Us* he shows financial enrichment as the only means for the workers to improve their daily plight, and in the long run to change social status. His embittered conclusion reads 'The terms 'Essex Men' and 'Thatcher's Children' were touted about as shorthand for these who had made it into the lower middle-class via new money rather than into the middle-class via education.'<sup>3</sup> This criticism of the British school system sounds nevertheless extremely mild compared with the virulent lampoons levelled by Guy Standing in *The Precariat*:

The commodification of education also makes for disappointment and anger. The drive by the education system to improve 'human capital' has not produced better job prospects. An education sold as an investment good that has no economic return for most buyers is, quite simply, a fraud.<sup>4</sup>

The sociologist continues decrying the current educational system which he accuses of perpetrating the class hierarchy on purpose: 'They pretend to educate us, we pretend to learn'. Infantilising the mind is part of the process, not for the elite but for the majority. Courses are made easier, so that pass rates can be maximised.'<sup>5</sup> A vitriolic criticism summed up as follows: 'These are dumbed-down degrees for dumbed-down workers.'<sup>6</sup> The school system is accused of fostering the inequalities through its antiquated set-up as the striking teachers vilify in *First Signs*:

This threatened strike action is about all kinds of things, it's about a festering discontent amongst vast numbers of teachers, at pay and conditions, it's about inequalities in the pay structure, it's about young teachers frustrated with a moribund system, it's about attracting the right people into the job, and making it an attractive job to be in. It's about equality and justice for all the children, and not just the same old privileged few.<sup>7</sup>

Throughout Barry Hines's literary works the working-class protagonists depicted feel as pariahs, excluded and harassed by the police, the army, the bosses, the politicians and the

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 114

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 86

<sup>3</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us*, Granta Books, London, 2004, p. 209

<sup>4</sup> Guy Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class*. Bloombury Academic; 2011, p. 67

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 72

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 72

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, pp. 171 & 172

teachers, just as their forbears did. This classification copies literally the arbitrary partition into two opposite entities of 'them and us'. The literary critic Pamela Fox, proposes a different definition of the group labelled 'us' which she calls the 'traditionally voiceless'. The enumeration drawn in the following passage from *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890- 1945* includes sections of the population which have been totally overlooked by the traditional definition:

(...) the 'traditionally voiceless': "working-class students, women, Blacks, and others need to affirm their own histories through the use of a language, a set of social relations, and body of knowledge that critically reconstructs and dignifies the cultural experiences that make up the tissue, texture and history of their daily lives."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand the traditional grid charting the two antagonistic groups 'them' and 'us' implicitly applied by Barry Hines in his works seems more and more contested. The post-modernist de-construction outlines a loathsome loose human conglomerate redolent of the Lumpen Proletariat according to Marx. The group is hastily bundled into the newly-coined term of 'Chav Nation' and assimilated to an underclass often synonymous with 'the underserving poor'. The definition by David Morley in the article entitled *Mediated Classifications: Representations of Class and Culture in Contemporary British Television* published in the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* uses criteria of the classification between 'them' and 'us' which remain simplistic as the new-fangled clichés betray: 'If the proletarian is a handsome, muscular young athlete, with a jaunty stride, and upright posture and good teeth, the lumpen is a thin, slouchy guy with shifty eyes and a cigarette drooping from his lips.'<sup>2</sup> Contrary to Barry Hines's faith in timeless values, many sociologists state the actual demise of the traditional working-class which they trace back to Margaret Thatcher's maxim in the early 1980s, 'there is no such thing as society, only individual men and women.' John Kirk recalls the effects of Thatcherism in *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class* thus:

Thatcherism's specific crusade was to eradicate both the reality and the memory of this formation (the Atlee administration of 1945) from the nation's consciousness, replacing them with the more atavistic images of Empire or Victorian values.

The white working class (...) as members of the growing 'underclass', thus somehow outside the class formation and social relations, a more degraded example of Marx's notion of the lumpenproletariat.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Pamela Fox, *Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890- 1945*; Duke University Press; Durham & London; 1994, p. 7

<sup>2</sup> David Morley, *Mediated class-ifications: Representations of class and culture in contemporary British television*, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Sept. 2003

<sup>3</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 173



Up-to-date definitions of the British working-class stress the part played by consumerism in the re-shaping of the whole society since the 1980s. It singles out two opposite sub-groups within: on the one hand the affluent who have made money and managed to flee from their original roots, even if they have only landed into the no-man's land of lower middle-class, and on the other the destitute whose predicament has worsened because of unemployment. Paradoxically Barry Hines's characters belong to none of these categories. Their emblematic charisma is part and parcel of the traditional working-class and their representation contrasts with the following image drawn by John Kirk in *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*:

The working-class are figured as not much more than aggressive little Englanders, right-wing and reactionary, to be pitied at best, despised at worst. Their Englishness is predicated on a dated and redundant colonial myth of racial superiority, shaping their world view, binding them to the past and blinding them to the new and emergent multicultural social space they inhabit.<sup>1</sup>

The striking discrepancy between the two representations posits the question of the veracity of Barry Hines's literary description. Do his characters still exist or do they belong to a bygone past? Ian Haywood considers that traditional working-class has vanished and the following analysis sounds like a funeral oration in *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting* published in 1997:

This emphasis on poverty rather than capitalist exploitation has had the ideological effect of submerging working-class identity (or significant fractions of it) into a heterogeneous, proletarianized underclass of alienated social groups, defined by their economic unproductiveness and an inability to participate fully in society: families living on social security, single parents, the disabled, the homeless, delinquents, drug addicts.<sup>2</sup>

Ian Haywood also reaches a peremptory verdict about the negative effect of post-modernism on the British working-class concludes that 'postmodernist theories have also marginalized the importance of class. Working-class traditions have been reduced to redundant metanarratives or textual constructions.'<sup>3</sup> Many sociologists agree about the demise of the working-class as the question mooted by Bromley and quoted by John Kirk in *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class* highlights:

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<sup>1</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 178

<sup>2</sup> Ian Haywood, *Working-Class Fiction from Chartism to Trainspotting*; Northcote House; Plymouth; 1997, p.141

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p.142

For Bromley, a major question to address at this stage is how one talks about the working class, in a period of class fragmentation and remaking.  
(...) Frequently then workers are seen as workless.  
(...) Characters struggle to find, or re-state, an identity coming 'under erasure.'<sup>1</sup>

According to John Kirk class is extinct as he propounds thus in *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*: 'post-working-class, where locality, culture and political autonomy are essential replacements for class identity. Class belongs to an older understanding of the social, a modernist moment eclipsed by the eclecticism of the post-modern.'<sup>2</sup> Has it really vanished or on the contrary does it need a new definition consonant with new economic conditions as Tim Edensor wonders in the article entitled *A Welcome Back to the Working-Class*: 'Issues about how to define class linger – whether by economic position, income, lifestyle, occupation, place, politics or habitus.'<sup>3</sup> The demise of traditional working-class is also evoked by Stephen Foster in *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace* as he sketches the supposedly new social entity as follows:

What you have here, you suddenly realise, is a base horde that you thought was a myth created by the Sun, a newspaper you boycott. What you have here are ordinary persons who have marked their cross next to the Con candidate. They are not even that unaffiliated brand of waster, the floating voter; they are much, much worse than that: they are working-class Tories. It is they who had delivered Margaret Thatcher to her throne.<sup>4</sup>

The impact of the eighties on the structure of the British society at large is stressed in John King's *Headhunters* as the writer envisions the sheer disappearance of classes thus: 'Maggie had understood this essential fact and was a true friend of those people prepared to get off their arses and graft. She was a patriot ground in the realities of multinational commerce. He had taken his chance and embraced the classless society.'<sup>5</sup> The crucial importance of this epoch in the history of Britain is summed up by Eric Hopkins in *The Rise and the Decline of the English Working Classes 1918-1990* as he stresses the part played by relative affluence: 'The very phrase "working class" acquired an old-fashioned ring, seemingly a kind of survival from the past, inappropriate in an age when everyone (apparently) had fitted carpets, a TV,

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<sup>1</sup> John Kirk, *Twentieth-Century Writing and the British Working-Class*; University of Wales Press; Cardiff; 2003, p. 19

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 179

<sup>3</sup> Tim Edensor, *A Welcome Back to the Working-Class*. School of Humanities and Social Sciences Staffordshire University. (Nov. 2009)

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p 62

<sup>5</sup> John King, *Headhunters*, Vintage, London, 1997, p 44

refrigerator, deep-freeze, microwave, car and so on.’<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines’s nostalgic outlook refutes this re-shuffling and abides by an enduring social entity bound by solidarity. His stance is on a par with Richard Hoggart’s account in the preface of *The Road to Wigan Pier* by George Orwell which claims, ‘Class distinctions do not die; they merely learn new ways of expressing themselves.’<sup>2</sup> I think that this is the very precept that underlies Barry Hines’s works as he reflects in *This Artistic Life*:

To me, the difference now is that it’s as if people live in their house, like a bubble, watching television maybe, then get into their car, and then go to the supermarket, all that without talking to anyone. Maybe that’s not bad, but if people are out a lot, it means you know each other and you feel safe, and you feel part of something, part of the village. I think it is important, but you know things change. People change.<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines sketches the changes during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with accuracy but he refutes the outright demise of the British working-class. He considers the historical episode of the early 1980s as a lost battle as one of the former colliers rues in *The Heart of It*: ‘We’d have won the strike if it hadn’t been for the Notts miners scabbing. Even with the government, the law, the police and the press against us; we’d still have won if we’d been united.’<sup>4</sup> Yet the tenor of his writings adumbrates a united working-class which would flout the professional jobs as the following passages from *First Signs* underline: ‘But we are talking about workers, we’re all workers, and the sooner we drop this professional poppycock and show a united front, then that’s when we’ll start making progress,’<sup>5</sup> and, ‘When you, the dockers and the miners, the car workers and the steel workers are in control, then we, the teachers, will be in control, and not until.’<sup>6</sup> This outlook is based on the sole importance of class and contrasts with Thomas Dunk’s stress on diverse criteria for the new definition in the article entitled *Remaking the Working Class: Experience, Class Consciousness, and the Industrial Adjustment Process*: ‘Other identities – as homeowners or members of a residential neighbourhood, ethnic or racial group, nation state, region or gender – are said to be more significant than class for workers.’<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines advocates class as the prime component of the social structure and his utopian view foregrounds a united group welded by political

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<sup>1</sup> Eric Hopkins, *The Rise and Decline of the Working Classes 1918-1990. A Social History*. Wiedenfeld & Nicolson London, 1991, p. 277

<sup>2</sup> George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Penguin, 1989, p. VII

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, 2009, p. 163

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 84

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 171

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., pp. 236 & 237

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Dunk, *Remaking the Working Class: Experience, Class Consciousness, and the Industrial Adjustment Process*. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (Nov., 2002), pp. 878-900

resilience and fighting which holds out throughout succeeding economic and human upheavals.

## **Chapter 4: Representations of Popular Culture.**

The nine novels by Barry Hines of our corpus illustrate the diverse elements of contemporary British working-class culture in a realistic way by the depiction of the geographic setting, of the protagonists and of the social bonds within and without the social microcosm. The previous parts of my study have dealt with relentless changes of the physical, human and social idiosyncrasies of Barry Hines's literary world. This chapter deals with the novelist's rendition of popular culture, that is to say the domain which has been the most affected during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The writer includes characteristics which often seem trivialities in his definition of culture in a similar way to George Orwell who states in *The Lion and The Unicorn* that 'all the culture that is most truly native centres round things which even when they are communal are not official – the pub, the football match, the back garden, the fireside and the 'nice cup of tea'.'<sup>1</sup> His assessment goes on as follows:

The genuinely popular culture of England is something that goes on beneath the surface, unofficially and more or less frowned on by the authorities. One thing one notices if one looks directly at the common people, especially in the big towns, is that they are not puritanical. They are inveterate gamblers, drink as much beer as their wages will permit, are devoted to bawdy jokes, and use probably the foulest language in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Not much seems to have changed since the publication of this essay in 1941 as such stereotypes features recur throughout contemporary British working-class literature. The accent laid on mundane details echoes the humorous list drawn by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society 1780 – 1950*:

Culture ... includes all the characteristic activities and interests of a people: Derby Day, Henley Regatta, Cowes, the twelfth of August, a cup final, the dog races, the pin table, the dart board, Wensleydale cheese, boiled cabbage cut into sections, beetroot in vinegar, nineteenth-century Gothic churches, and the music of Elgar.<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines abides by this definition through multifarious references to everyday cultural items to delineate a contemporary working-class backdrop. The stress laid on trite details illustrates the complexity of British popular culture which is still steeped in a nostalgic imagery and yet affected by the impact of mass culture mainly imported from the United States of America. The following excerpt from *The Lion and the Unicorn*, written more than sixty years ago by George Orwell, encapsulates the re-modelling of contemporary working-class culture:

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Penguin Books Ltd, 1982, p. 39

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 40

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780 - 1950*, Chatto and Windus, 1958, pp. 233 & 234

To an increasing extent the rich and the poor read the same books, and they also see the same films and listen to the same radio programmes. And the differences in their way of life have been diminished by the mass-production of cheap clothes and improvements in housing.<sup>1</sup>

However Barry Hines refutes the standardization of working-class culture according to these criteria. He vehemently confutes its impending demise due to the advent of mass-production advocated by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy* as follows: 'But at present the older, the more narrow but also more genuine class culture is being eroded in favour of the mass opinion, the mass recreational product, and the generalized emotional response.'<sup>2</sup> On the contrary he extols its uniqueness and its resilience. These characteristics are evoked by John Fiske in *Understanding Popular Culture* in his definition: 'All popular culture is a process of struggle, of struggle over the meanings of social experience, of one's personhood and its relations to the social order and of the texts and commodities to that order.'<sup>3</sup> The dynamism of the social entity is stressed in its appropriation of the cultural items and in its re-shaping.

In order to illustrate the diversity of working-class culture described by Barry Hines I have chosen three themes which are inherent to the human and social setting of his works. I wish to start with the most important notion: television since it intrudes upon the protagonists' privacy and thus their perceptions are altered unwillingly and even unwittingly. I will then study the impact of cinema and the dream-like world it successfully conjures up. The impact of literature, that is to say all the written material that is browsed and read by the representatives of the popular class will be the next issue of this chapter. Last but not least, the last part of this chapter will deal with Barry Hines's contribution to television and cinema. The diverse scope offered by these complementary cultural devices enables Barry Hines's unremittingly humanist and political message to reach a wider audience throughout the succeeding decades of the end of the 20th century.

#### **4. 1 Television**

Television has, without doubt, been the favourite cultural pastime of the British working-class members for decades. Its advent as a just reward for the worker's hard work is alluded to by Alan Sillitoe in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. It is synonymous with the advent of the material consumer goods which better wages enable to purchase:

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<sup>1</sup> George Orwell, *The Lion and the Unicorn*, Penguin Books Ltd, 1982, p. 67

<sup>2</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 343

<sup>3</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 1989, p. 28

And now he had a sit-down job at the factory, all the Woodbines he could smoke, money for a pint if he wanted one, though he didn't as a rule drink, a holiday somewhere, a jaunt on the firm's trip to Blackpool, and a television-set to look into at home.<sup>1</sup>

Television is present throughout the nine novels of our corpus by Barry Hines, and the writer shows vividly the increasing impact of this media on British working-class during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Television is omnipresent as it is switched on all the time and everywhere, even if nobody is actually watching it. It figures in the first novel of our corpus, *The Blinder*, written in 1966, where it vies with the radio. Its importance in the protagonists' daily lives, albeit nascent, is stressed by the writer as the young footballer bewails: 'Quarter to eleven. I'll just miss Sports Special.' – 'Come home with me and watch it.'<sup>2</sup> In *A Kestrel for a Knave*, published in 1968, the negative effects of television are lampooned by the teachers: 'Or sitting up 'til dawn watching some tripe on television!'<sup>3</sup> The derogatory comments continue as follows: 'You're just fodder for the mass media.'<sup>4</sup> The growing impact of television is made implicit in the final scene of this narrative with the description of Billy Casper roaming the streets at night after the death of his kestrel: 'A television on too loud, throwing the dialogue out into the garden.'<sup>5</sup> The encroachment of television upon the daily lives of the working-class is condemned by Dennis Potter in *The Changing Forest* in the early 1960s. He decries this infringement which he blames for the loss of family and community values: "Home" as a word has shifted meaning; not only because of television and the invasion of commercialism through its so-called 'independent' channels, but because the whole background to Forest of Dean life has yawed into another angle.'<sup>6</sup> The author's outright disparagement goes on by using precise but somewhat out-dated examples, 'the external culture comes from the telly, and mostly from commercial television: on the whole, I think, television that is dreary, repetitive, sordid, commercial and second-rate.'<sup>7</sup>

In *The Price of Coal*, the omnipresence of television is stressed by the numerous allusions which punctuate the whole narration. It is on when Syd comes back home: 'He carried the rose through into the living-room where Mark, his youngest son, was sitting on the

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<sup>1</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Star Books, 1979, p. 26

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 103

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 52

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 56

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 155

<sup>6</sup> Dennis Potter, *The Changing Forest*, Minerva, 1962, pp. 9 & 10

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 129

settee with his legs up watching a cricket match on television.’<sup>1</sup> It is on as father and son settled down to watch the match: ‘On the screen, the bowler changed the position of one of the fielders, and it looked as if Syd was in disagreement with this decision rather than with his wife.’<sup>2</sup> It is still on as the two miners are rushing back to work: ‘As the door opened wider, the sound from the television grew louder,’<sup>3</sup> and a few minutes later: ‘Harry and Syd did not wait to hear how, but rushed inside to watch the slow motion replay.’<sup>4</sup> The infringement into working-class households may be resented as the hackneyed jokes bandied between Syd and his wife reveal: ‘You’ll watch owt.’ ‘It’s good.’ ‘Good? I’d sooner watch paint drying.’<sup>5</sup> Watching television to while the time away is also alluded to in *Looks and Smiles*: ‘But it was too early to go home yet. He hated being in the house in the afternoon; watching horse-racing on television and going to sleep on the settee.’<sup>6</sup>

The nine novels of our corpus draw the growing importance of television in the lives of Barry Hines’s characters. In *The Price of Coal* it symbolises fame as Mark enthuses about a cricket match: ‘We might be on telly, eh?’<sup>7</sup> The intrusion of television in the workers’ daily lives is illustrated by the hoax the miners play on one of their most gullible apprentices. The practical joke follows an utterly stereotyped scenario. The harmless prank played on the young recruit is humorously detailed thus:

‘Well while you’re waiting, you can come with us and mend our television.’ (...)

‘We’ve got a portable telly in the gate. Forbes says we can only have it on at snap time though. He says we’ll not do the job right if we watch it while we’re working.’ (...)

‘I wouldn’t have thought a telly would have worked down here.’

‘Oh, it’s a good ’un is this one, Steve. One of them Japanese jobs.’

Frank Morris looked up at Syd and winked.

‘Is it a colour set, Syd?’

‘We’d better get it mended then.’<sup>8</sup>

The place of television is presented as crucial in Barry Hines’s narratives. The succession of the programmes punctuates the daily activities and even dictates them. Yet it is

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Penguin, 1979, p. 13

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 15

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 16

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 16

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 63

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 137

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Penguin, 1979, p. 98

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 104



inherent to the protagonists' choices as John Fiske stresses in *Understanding Popular Culture*: ‘

But the routines of popular culture, in this case television, are voluntary; they are chosen, they are pleasurable. They thus provide a means of evading the sense of subjection to the parallel, required, repressive routines of domestic labor. Routine lives require routine pleasures.<sup>1</sup>

Titles of programmes become household names for the succeeding generations such as ‘Candid Camera’ which stands as a synonym for practical jokes played on harmless bystanders. The following reference is from *Looks and Smiles*: ‘You what? Buy my tie?’ Perhaps it was a hoax. He glanced up at the upper storeys of the buildings around him. ‘What’s this, Candid Camera or something?’<sup>2</sup> The narration of *Elvis Over England* uses similar popular allusions to delineate the farcical situations within the plot: ‘No. I don’t mean painting your house. I mean would you like me to paint a picture of your house?’ The proposal was so absurd that Eddie glanced round for the hidden camera.’<sup>3</sup> The relentless intrusion of television into people’s lives is underlined by the countless actual names which strike a chord with the readers from all walks of life. In a similar vein this is, without doubt, the case for ‘*This is Your Life*’, a British biographical television document which was launched in 1955 and spanned sporadically the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The passage from *Unfinished Business* hints at the element of surprise which encapsulates this programme as follows: ‘He could not have sounded more surprised if he had been selected as the celebrity for *This is Your Life*.’<sup>4</sup>

In *Elvis Over England*, Eddie’s wife, Pearl, automatically thinks of a television series at the noisy and flashy irruption of the fateful pink Cadillac: ‘She stared at him. She was paralysed. She couldn’t speak. She couldn’t think ... It couldn’t be. And the car? It was a hoax. Wotsisname on the telly?’<sup>5</sup> Television programmes give rhythm to the daily lives of the the working-class members. In this novel, the heterogeneous list shores the humorous plot whereas the references to real programmes grant the narration veracity. The chronological planning of the heroine’s day seems planned like clockwork around the series which she watches day in day out: ‘Eddie looked at his watch. Pearl would be watching *Neighbours* now. He could see her resting on the sofa with a mug of tea, her head slowly falling jerking

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<sup>1</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p. 65

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 162

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 49

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 96

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 38

upright as she struggled to say awake.’<sup>1</sup> The reference to the programme ‘*Neighbours*’, an Australian soap opera which has been shown in Great Britain since 1986, sets the narrative chronologically. The daily tasks articulate around the plethora of soap operas as the hero muses about his wife’s activities: ‘She would have watched Coronation Street from behind the bar at the White Hart.’<sup>2</sup> Paradoxically it is exactly the programme which the sluggish landlord of the Scottish bed and breakfast is watching while Eddie is waiting: ‘He could have learned it off by heart by the time the landlord appeared through the curtain, accompanied by the closing theme music of Coronation Street.’<sup>3</sup> The loop is looped as the cultural network flouts geographical distances and regional specificities. The working-class members’ lives revolve round soap operas which punctuate their daily activities. The diverse programmes jostle for the spectators’ attention and have become household names. Besides, their longevity accentuates the impression of permanence as their rhythmic succession echoes the chronological daily chores.

John Fiske highlights the interactions between the television series and the activities thus in *Understanding Popular Culture*:

One set of interconnections is made between the parallel routines of the household and the TV schedule. Like housework, popular texts are ephemeral, rapidly consumed, and need to be repeated, so the seriality and repetition of popular culture produce a routinization that is easily mapped onto the routines of everyday life.<sup>4</sup>

Television programmes have spun a kind of common pseudo-cultural web based on stereotypes. John King underlines the scope of soap operas in *Headhunters* through clichés such as: ‘All Northerners were like you saw on Coronation Street. But it wasn’t a patch on Eastenders.’<sup>5</sup> The importance of television was already foreshadowed and scathingly criticised by Alan Sillitoe in *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*:

Television, he thought scornfully when she’d gone, they’d go barmy if they had them taken away. I’d love it if big Black Marias came down all the streets and men got out with hatchets to go in every house and smash the tellies. Everybody’d go crackers. They wouldn’t know what to do. There’d be a revolution, I’m sure there would, they’d blow-up the Council and set fire to the Castle. It wouldn’t bother me if there weren’t any television sets, though, not one bit.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 168

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., 1998, p. 168

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 167

<sup>4</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p. 65

<sup>5</sup> John King, *Headhunters*, Vintage, London, 1997, p. 149

<sup>6</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, Star Books, 1979, p. 188

This scornful rejection of television is shared by the hero of *A Kind of Loving* by Stan Barstow: 'Telly.' I don't like that word somehow. It always reminds me of fat ignorant pigs of people swilling stout and cackling like hens of the sort of jokes they put on them coloured seaside postcards; all about fat bellies and chamber pots and that kind of thing.'<sup>1</sup> The writer bewails the impact of this media on working-class culture and pinpoints the nascent mass culture forced upon the passive spectators: 'The latest boy wonder from Clacknecuddenthistle who gets on television because he happens to have a check shirt and a guitar and a lot of bloody cheek.'<sup>2</sup> A few decades later Barry Hines recapitulates the diverse facets of the impact of television in *Looks and Smiles*. The narration shows with realism but does not comment:

He watched the dancers. There were many different styles. One group of girls, dancing in a line, had copied their routine from artists they had seen on the television. They all faced the same way, performed the same steps, the same simultaneous turns, the same semaphore movements of the arms. They even smiled together. They had practised a long time to records at home to become as skilful as that. Some thought they were on the television, or on a film, or on the stage.<sup>3</sup>

In *The Likes of Us*, the sociologist Michael Collins retraces the historical changes of the media in the 20th Century and decries the failure of the BBC to reach a popular audience: 'The BBC was in the business of educating and entertaining the masses, but it never got around to employing them. Despite the talk of revolution that emanated from the upper echelons throughout the decade, it continued to operate a form of institutionalised classism. The Oxbridge graduates favoured by Reith continued to dominate.'<sup>4</sup> The glut of soap operas translates the cultural fiasco. They nonetheless constitute a network of common knowledge as the following conversation from *Elvis Over England* renders in a volley of repartees mimicking a television quiz. The tongue-in-cheek transcription of the lively dialogue enumerates the real names of the popular programmes:

'It looks a picture, standing there by the pumps. It's like a scene on that American series on TV.'

Sergeant: 'Dallas?'

The attendant shook his head.

Eddie: '*Dynasty?*'

'I never watched it.'

Constable: '*Miami Vice?*'

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<sup>1</sup> Stan Barstow, *A Kind of Loving*, Billing and Sons Limited, Guildford, 1982, pp 100 & 101

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p 164

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 50

<sup>4</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us*, London, Granta Books, 2004, p. 166

‘No. Not that one.’

They were stuck then and they stared at the crimson Cadillac, thinking hard. (...) ‘Perhaps it wasn’t a series. It might have been an advert –’,<sup>1</sup>

The references in the previous excerpt highlight the internationalisation of series on British television. The different soap operas are famous all over the world and are inherent to popular culture worldwide. These series jostle with the British soap operas and occupy a specific niche on television. ‘*Dallas*’ was shown from 1978 until 1991, ‘*Dynasty*’ from 1981 to 1989 and ‘*Miami Vice*’ from 1984 until 1989. The three programmes add an American exotic touch and are synonymous with lowbrow entertainment. The latter American television crime drama series crops up in Barry Hines’s novel entitled *The Heart of It* which revolves around the political and class awareness of working-class writer:

I did four episodes of the Agatha Christie series that has just been on television.

Charlie shook his head. No. I don’t like that sort of thing. There’s no action. I like American detectives best.

I did a couple of episodes of *Miami Vice*. Did you ever watch that?

Yes. That was great stuff.<sup>2</sup>

Advertising is present throughout Barry Hines’s works as the author realistically depicts the working-class environment during the last decades of the 20th century. The stress is laid implicitly on the relentless advent of consumer society and its consequences on the daily popular way of life. The following excerpt from *Looks and Smiles* underlines the subtle invasion: ‘The policemen stood blocking the doorway just inside the living-room. Nobody moved, nobody spoke and the spurious joviality of a cornflakes advertisement became unbearable in the tense silence between them.’<sup>3</sup> The light-hearted allusions humorously intersperse the narrations such as the following excerpt from *The Heart of It*: ‘Mrs Allsop’s started to wear a wig. It’s red. You’ve never seen anything like it. She looks like that mother chimp on the PG Tips advert.’<sup>4</sup> A hint suffices to provoke a string of associations which delve into a commonly shared trove of popular cultural data. The references span generations as the following examples from *Elvis Over England* illustrate: ‘His growling ‘r’ reminded Eddie of Tony the Tiger on the old Rice Crispies advert,’<sup>5</sup> or ‘Do you remember that goldfish on the Tweetie Pie cartoons that used to flutter its eyelashes and smack its lips at the cat?’ This reminiscence prompts a pinch of nostalgia which the elderly reader eagerly shares. The mere

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp. 148 & 149

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 9

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 19

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 96

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 147

allusion to a product succeeds in conjuring up a set of implicit values. At the very beginning of *Elvis Over England*, the conversation between Eddie and two dealers in counterfeit goods adopts this facetious vein with stereotyped repartees: ‘You look like the Daz advert, man!’ ‘New improved?’ ‘Definitely!’<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines’s depiction of the part played by advertisements sounds upbeat and humoristic and contrasts with Alan Sillitoe’s scathing comments about the uselessness and spuriousness of advertising in *The Death of William Posters* through a working-class protagonist’s insult at an adman:

The world’s top heavy with you and your sort who wank people’s brains off every night with telly advertisements that make them happy at carrying slugs like you on their backs, but I’d like to see you do a real day’s work, if you could.<sup>2</sup>

The accuracy of the names of the series broadcast on British television and their transcription in italics testify to the veracity of Barry Hines’s cultural background. The same appellations crop up in Michael Collins’s analysis of the advent and evolution of popular media since the 1960s in *The Likes of Us*. The critic stresses the veracity of the transcription of the series as the lauds ‘the gritty realism found in the weekly visits to Weatherfield’s *Coronation Street*’.<sup>3</sup> The analysis of the popularity of the programme echoes the nostalgic aura which tints Barry Hines’s rendition of the British working-class:

By creating the series Tony Warren said he wished to explore ‘The driving force behind life in a working-class street in the north of England’. The programme focused on the traditional staples of the working-class neighbourhood – The Street, The Pub, The Corner Shop – that were fast disappearing in the urban areas of the city, and even more so in London; replaced by the growth of high-rise housing estates. Like *Andy Capp*, who had emerged as a cartoon strip in 1957, *Coronation Street*, transmitted three years later, was largely peddling nostalgia for a way of life that appeared to be dying out. Even the habits of the families on *Coronation Street* owed more to the previous generation.<sup>4</sup>

The television programmes are categorised according to low-brow and high-brow criteria and the real names immediately strike a cultural chord. The same names crop up throughout the four novels by Barry Hines as the programmes span the successive decades. This is the case for the British quiz show, *Mastermind*, famous for its challenging questions, which is mentioned in *The Price of Coal*: ‘You ought to be on ‘*Mastermind*’, Frank, all that

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 6

<sup>2</sup> Alan Sillitoe, *The Death of William Posters*, A Star Book, W.H. Allen, 1978, p. 37

<sup>3</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us*, London, Granta Books, 2004, p. 171

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 171

stuff that you know about horses.’<sup>1</sup> A similar awestruck respect is betrayed by Eddie in a hilarious scene from *Elvis Over England*: ‘You should be on Mastermind.’ ‘Ask me anything. I’m an encyclopaedia on Elvisology.’<sup>2</sup> The quiz which has been renowned for its intimidating setting and its air of seriousness since September 1972 is sarcastically mentioned in *Unfinished Business*. The derisive allusion betrays the working-class member’s inability to cope with his wife’s decision to study: ‘And sometimes, when they were out with friends, he made them laugh by calling her “Brain of Britain” or “Mastermind”’.<sup>3</sup> The concomitant reference to the BBC radio general knowledge quiz: ‘Brain of Britain’ which has been broadcast since 1953 seals the simplistic differentiation between highbrow and lowbrow forms of culture.

The quiz *University Challenge* is yet another household name which does not require any further explanation. This British programme has been pitting teams of students from different universities against each other in a general knowledge quiz since 1962 and is synonymous with highbrow entertainment in contrast with a plethora of more glitzy shows. It is alluded to humorously in *Elvis Over England* by the bemused hitch-hiker whom Eddie has just picked up: ‘All he wanted was a lift into town, not an audition for *University Challenge*.’<sup>4</sup> The famous quiz is alluded to once again as Eddie voices his admiration for Sue that no question about Elvis Presley can stymie: ‘I told you. I’m an Elvis fan.’ - ‘Yeah, I know, but that’s *University Challenge* stuff.’<sup>5</sup> The so-called educational part played by television within the popular class is highlighted in a tongue-in-cheek way in *Elvis Over England*:

‘Who’s heard of Elvis Presley?’

‘Me!’ they chorused, and one boy instinctively raised his hand as if he was at school.

‘He was a singer.’

Others added quick-fire contributions.

‘Rock’n’roll!’

‘Jailhouse Rock!’ It was on the telly.’<sup>6</sup>

The supposed educational role of television is once again outlined in a deadpan humorous way in *Elvis Over England* as Eddie shows off his patchy knowledge of British history to an utterly dumbfounded Scottish farmer. Historical clichés and regional prejudices

<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 106

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 132

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 32

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 122

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 191

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 70

are used: ‘We were driven from our rightful land by the English way back in the eighteenth century.’ (...) He knew about this episode in Scottish history from watching the film *Bonnie Prince Charlie*.<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines’s humour relies on the implicit as it is based on common knowledge. The allusions are understandable: ‘Eddie hoped that they weren’t screening an epic like *Ben Hur* on ITV. Adding on time taken by the news and commercial breaks, he could be facing starvation by the time it arrived.’<sup>2</sup> The latest novel of our corpus teems with titles of television programmes without any explanation whatsoever. This media stands out as the main purveyor of knowledge and the principal link between people from different classes. It reaches all the social strata as the tongue-in-cheek passage from *Elvis Over England* foregrounds: ‘If the portrait was even shown on *Crimewatch*, the switchboard would be jammed with callers.’<sup>3</sup> The narrator resorts to household names to conjure up a realistic background where far-fetched events unravel in a humorous vein. The comments and criticisms are implicitly implied amongst hilarious episodes in tune with the main protagonist’s wacky behaviour. The quotations of television series provide this make-believe backdrop as fiction and facts intertwine.

The condemnation of television as a means of political propaganda is a recurrent issue in working-class literature. Barry Hines’s accounts are no exception as Syd’s snide accusations in *The Price of Coal* underscore: ‘Takes their minds off the real issues more like. Look at the other night on the telly. There was the Chancellor of the Exchequer speaking at some banquet or other.’<sup>4</sup> This theme is recurrent in working-class literature as Philip Hensher’s protagonist intimates in *The Northern Clemency*:

You won’t find the truth out by watching the news on television. It’s all staged’

‘How do you mean?’

‘I mean, as everybody knows, the television companies, they’re going down to the picket lines and paying people at the back of the crowd to throw bricks at the police. It makes a better picture’.<sup>5</sup>

The Australian sociologist, John Fiske, highlights the complexity of the treatment of news and politics by television broadcasters. He debunks the supposedly blind acceptance by a passive popular audience in *Reading The Popular*:

A politically ignorant and apathetic electorate will be unable to produce high-calibre politicians. So television news, for example, is caught in the tension between the need

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 115

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 168

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 54

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Penguin, 1979, p. 44

<sup>5</sup> Philip Hensher, *The Northern Clemency*, Fourth Estate, London, 2008, p. 410

to convey information deemed to be in the public interest and the need to be popular. It attempts to meet these contradictory needs by being socially responsible in content, but popular in form and presentation, and thus runs the risk of being judged boring and irrelevant from one side, and superficial and rushed from the other. It is caught between competing relevancies at the national (or global) level and at the local level of everyday life, and can be judged to be successful only when it manages to merge the two into one.<sup>1</sup>

John Fiske hones his research in *Understanding Popular Culture* and propounds an original theory according to which spectators are much more active than expected. They are not represented as mere passive recipients but on the contrary as actors:

The ways in which television is watched can be used to define and live the differences between genders, between work and leisure, between waged work and domestic work, between the centered, focused mode of masculine attention, and the decentered or other-centered mode of feminine. It is people's position in the culture of everyday life that determines how they integrate their TV watching into it, and not TV that determines people's everyday lives.<sup>2</sup>

Owen Jones retraces the drastic shift in the representation of the British working-class thanks to precise historical data in *Chavs*: 'A real milestone was the launch of *Coronation Street* on ITV in 1960. For the first time a TV series revolved around sympathetic, realistic working-class characters and looked at how they lived their lives. It struck a chord and within months attracted over 20 million viewers.'<sup>3</sup> The empathy betrayed by the spectators' infatuation echoes Barry Hines's depiction and contrasts with the ulterior negative image rendered as follows: 'The big shift in portrayal is surely – and it's an obvious point but it's surely a true point – that from about the 80s, it became possible in the media to, as it were, disparage the working class in a disrespectful and wholly unkind way.'<sup>4</sup> The researcher's analysis actually cites accurate examples thus:

Among the earliest examples of these sentiments filtering into popular culture were two characters invented by comedian Harry Enfield, Wayne and Waynetta Slob. First appearing in 1990, they could be regarded as 'proto-chavs': feckless, foul-mouthed, benefit-dependent and filthy.<sup>5</sup>

The sociologist uses the following quotation by the film maker Ken Loach to lambast the current wilful distortion of the working class image by the media:

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<sup>1</sup> John Fiske, *Reading The Popular*, Routledge, 2004, p. 6

<sup>2</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, pp. 154

<sup>3</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 110

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 111

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 111



(...) although soaps are set on working-class communities there is a patronizing view of it in that here are people who are quaint and a bit raw and a bit rough and a bit funny. But you sense there is – and I don't think this was the original intention of *Coronation Street* – but there's now a kind of implied middle-class norm which views them and their antics and their fallings out and their fallings in love ... as, well, 'characters'.<sup>1</sup>

A similar condemnation is voiced by Guy Standing in his incisive study of the modern working-class as he lampoons the biased image by the media in *The Precariat*:

They can be depicted as abnormal in not knowing what to do or not being able to 'settle down' in a steady job, or they may be labelled 'virtually unemployable'. The epithets are all too familiar, churned out by the media, by soap operas on television and by politicians.<sup>2</sup>

This derogatory image of the contemporary working-class conveyed through television contrasts with Barry Hines's standpoint. The writer underlines the positive impact of television as a means of vulgarization of popular culture. The references to documentaries, series and quizzes crop up as common knowledge shared by the protagonists.

The next part deals with the part played by cinema in working-class culture as it intertwines fiction and reality at will.

#### **4. 2 Cinema.**

Cinema as a form of popular culture is omnipresent in the nine novels by Barry Hines of our corpus. It always is synonymous with a way-out of the working-class members' dreary everyday lives. The most moving description of this item of popular culture is, without doubt, the final scene of *A Kestrel for a Knave* as Billy Casper slinks into a derelict cinema where he used to go with his father. The grief-stricken youth after his falcon's death seeks physical and moral comfort and solace there. The current quest is rendered by the repetition of words such as 'warmth' and a string of gerunds which hint at regretted bygones. The extremely precise and detailed depiction of the cinema highlights the crucial importance of the youngster's happy memories and borrows concrete stereotypes: 'Billy shivered and pulled his jacket about him, trying to fold his arms inside it, his hands in his armpits finding the warmth there. The warmth there ... the warmth of the pictures ... the pictures full ...'<sup>3</sup> The literary rendition refers to accurate items associated with going to the cinema such as: 'A bag of sweets down

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 132

<sup>2</sup> Guy Standing, *The Precariat. The New Dangerous Class*. Bloombury Academic; 2011, p. 126

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 159

between his thighs,’<sup>1</sup> and ‘Smoky warmth, cones of smoke caught in the projection beams,’<sup>2</sup> and ‘News, trailers and adverts. Lights going up.’<sup>3</sup> The different parts of the performance are described through the enumeration of concrete details as follows:

An ice-cream. An ice-cream for his dad. Two tubs. Lights going down, staining the draperies pink, through mauve to purple. Settling down, a full tub, and some sweets still left in his bag. Settling down, warm between his dad and the other man. Big Picture. The Big Picture. The End.<sup>4</sup>

The scene in the cinema encapsulates Billy Casper’s fleeting moment of happiness with his father and is copied to outline his grief at the loss of his kestrel. The narration mingles memories, fiction and fantasy: ‘Big Picture. Billy as hero. Billy on the screen. Big Billy. Kes on his arm. Big Kes. Close up. Technicolor. Looking round, looking down on them all, fierce-eyed. Audience murmuring.’<sup>5</sup> The disappearance and the demise of the bird are translated into filmic expressions which underline the grief and the utter powerlessness of the youngster in the face of outside factors: ‘Still clear. Faster, breathtaking, blurring, blurring and fading. No contact! No contact!’<sup>6</sup>

The prime importance bestowed on cinema is rendered in a similar scene in *Looks and Smiles*. The episode conjures up happy memories for Karen, the young heroine, as she remembers her father she pines for: ‘It was tonight. It brought it all back. My dad used to take me to the pictures in the school holidays when I was little...’<sup>7</sup>

The stereotyped cinematographic scenes conjure up a backdrop peopled by household names of film stars. The sole mention suffices to trigger symbolical references conveyed by popular culture. The following excerpt from *The Blinder* alludes to the hero’s gait thus: ‘Down the street and round the entry and on one leg like Charlie Chaplin.’<sup>8</sup> A similar hint describes the young successful footballer: ‘weaving through the crowd like Groucho Marx’<sup>9</sup> Allusions do not need any explanation whatsoever as they flout the national and class cultures. The two following instances from *The Gamekeeper* illustrate the mass culture: ‘Unlike Tarzan, he had no convenient creeper at hand,’<sup>10</sup> and ‘But the tone of his reprimand

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 159

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 159

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 159

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 159

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 159

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 159

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 75

<sup>8</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, pp. 19 & 20

<sup>9</sup> Op. cit., p. 35

<sup>10</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 57

would have intimidated King Kong.’<sup>1</sup> In *Looks and Smiles*, the giant cinema monster resembling an awesome gorilla is alluded to as follows in the relation of a heated conversation between Mick Walsh and a lady who wants him to let her access the phone box read thus:

‘You’ll come out if I fetch my husband to you, you cheeky young devil!’

Mick bobbed down and spoke to her through a broken pane in the door.

‘Look, missus. You can fetch King Kong if you like, but I’m stopping in here till somebody answers this phone. It’s important is this.’<sup>2</sup>

Cinema is inherent to popular culture and symbolises an escape from the dreary routine. The flight from one’s bleak daily plight is conjured up by clichés such as idyllic and exotic settings. The following colourful and supposedly blissful scene in *Looks and Smiles* implies this humorously:

The sunlit landscape on the screen was so bright that they were able to find their own seats without any help from the usherette’s torch. They had just settled down in the middle of the row; when the location of the film changed to a beach at night where a troupe of native musicians and dancers were entertaining a party of garishly dressed tourists at a barbecue. Everyone looked as if they were enjoying the best time they had ever had in their lives. They all looked desperately happy.<sup>3</sup>

In *Elvis Over England* Eddie does not just dream of escaping and allegedly goes one step further through purchasing the pink Cadillac of his wildest dreams. The flight from reality is on a par with Eddie’s wacky humour and childlike candour. The make-believe situation is based on the similarity with a filmic backdrop:

But even so, as he gazed down at the Cadillac, glistening in the morning sunlight, he was still glad he had bought it. He was awe-struck by its presence. It cheered him up just looking at it. It had transformed the garden into a Technicolor film set. The flowers were brighter, the birds sang louder. People smiled at the car as they passed by, and even the neighbour’s brute of a dog was wagging its tail as it looked through the dividing fence.<sup>4</sup>

The nine narrations of our corpus teem with allusions to film stars. The precise references span the succeeding decades and borrow from diverse epochs. Some names may sound unfamiliar nowadays like the reference to Leslie Welch (1907- 1980) who was a British radio and television entertainer known as the Memory Man, yet the obscure hints do not impede the general comprehension. The author mingles the allusions humorously through the juxtaposition of the allusion to the American actress, Racquel Welch, famous as a sex symbol

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 144

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 89

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., pp. 71 & 72

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, pp. 43 & 44

in the 1960s and the culinary mention of the Welsh rarebit. The play-on-words based on the phonetic similarities are bandied about in the following hilarious dialogue from *The Price of Coal*:

‘He knows some stuff does Syd. He’s got a better memory than Leslie Welch.’

‘Leslie Welch? Who’s he?’

At first the others thought Alan was fooling. But then, realizing his age, they knew that he meant it. Harry was annoyed with him for being so young.

‘The only Welsh he knows is Welsh rarebit.’

‘Racquel Welch. I know her.’

‘Bloody hell. I wish I did.’

They laughed, but they had misread his mood. Harry did not mean lust.<sup>1</sup>

The fantasy world which cinema conjures up is synonymous with escapism and helps the working-class protagonists to put up with their dreary everyday lives. Barry Hines’s social and political message reads through the implicit condemnation as one of the miners bewails ruefully in this same excerpt from *The Price of Coal*: ‘Her name symbolized a better kind of life, a life of luxury and glamour; and as he stood there in his ragged clothes, with a weak back, waiting to go to work in the freezing darkness for seven hours, it accentuated the paucity of his own life.’<sup>2</sup>

The cinematographic allusions are synonymous with escapism through a complicity based on the implicit knowledge shared. The numerous examples which crop up in the successive narratives delineate the Americanisation of British culture since World War Two. The following excerpt from *Looks and Smiles* stresses the impact of cinema upon popular culture through references to Hollywood celebrities:

Students of the City Art College had painted a series of murals on the concrete walls of the tunnel in an attempt to brighten up the passage and, at the same time, bring Art to the people. They had called it the People’s Gallery. The pictures were mainly conventional landscapes, copies of famous paintings (even down to the original artist’s signature) and crude but recognizable portraits of Hollywood film-stars. The subject matter was either foreign, romantic or derivative. The masterpiece of the exhibition was a full-length portrait of John Wayne wearing a white hat and holding a revolver.<sup>3</sup>

In Barry Hines’s writings the Americanisation of the British society is used merely as a historical parameter. The blandness of this outlook contrasts with Richard Hoggart’s scathing criticism of this intrusion in *The Uses of Literacy*. His disparagement of those ‘juke-

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 23

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 23

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp. 67 & 68

box boys, of those who spend their evenings listening in harshly lighted milk-bars to the “nickelodeons”<sup>1</sup> reads as follows:

Many of the customers – their clothes, their hair-styles, their facial expressions all indicate- are living to a large extent in a myth-world compounded of a few simple elements which they take to be those of American life.

They form a depressing group and one by no means typical of working-class people; perhaps most of them are rather less intelligent than the average, and are therefore even more exposed than others to the debilitating mass-trends of the day. They have no aim, no ambition, no protection, no belief.<sup>2</sup>

The researcher’s censure is reminiscent of Stan Barstow’s critical comments about the American culture in *A Kind of Loving*: ‘One of them has a leather jacket and a crewcut. He looks as though he’s walked out of an American picture. It’s all Yankeeeland these days.’<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines’s literary rendition of this era follows a diametrically opposite stance by retracing the love affair between Eddie’s mother and an American soldier during the Second World War in *Elvis Over England*. The hero’s yearning for his father, whom he has never met, tints the whole narrative with rueful melancholy. The historical setting of the war epoch is drawn through numerous allusions to American film stars. A basic knowledge is demanded as no explanations are put forward. A sole physical feature suffices as the following allusion to Tyrone Power, renowned for his dark classically handsome looks, illustrates, ‘What’s the movie like?’ the boy with the dark eyes and the Tyrone Power looks asked.’<sup>4</sup> Imaginary filmic situations supersede the dreary background of Eddie’s desperate flight: ‘He was playing out scenes from films he had seen, where romantic intrigue always took place in luxurious bedrooms with silk sheets and tiger-skin rugs. He had never seen Bette Davis open a love letter in the coal cellar’.<sup>5</sup> The multifarious allusions delve into the past and obey the chronology of the novel as it hints at the youth of Eddie’s mother during the Second World War. The names quoted abide by the realistically timed scenario: ‘She was compared with Betty Gable, Rita Hayworth and Dorothy Lamour before she had finished her drink. She was a pin-up girl. Hollywood beckoned.’<sup>6</sup> The array of female film stars from the 1940s highlights the common knowledge which constitutes the substratum of popular culture. Eddie’s auto-derision articulates around the fantasy world based on famous names. From the glamorous

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin, 1981, p. 247

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 248 & 249

<sup>3</sup> Stan Barstow, *A Kind of Loving*, Billing and Sons Limited, Guildford, 1982, p. 163

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 139

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 139

<sup>6</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 145

world of films the plot slides into self-derision by the wacky mixture of cultural entities. Fred Astaire has hilariously been replaced by an unexpected cartoon and comic character: Bluto, the laughable figure of the large, bearded and muscle-bound enemy of Popeye. The bitterly derisive comment reads thus:

He thought of Pearl and how brilliantly they danced together and wondered how they would perform now. Pearl would still be nifty on her pins; she hadn't put on a pound since they met. But himself? The picture that came to mind was Ginger Rogers dancing with Bluto.<sup>1</sup>

Comical interludes are recurrently built up through a sole cinematographic allusion as the following description of Jack coming back from Burma at the end of the war. The moral and physical hardships he has endured are rendered in a dead-pan way by the allusion to his emaciated and haggard figure: 'Would she even recognize him? Bouts of malaria had left him much thinner than when he went away. He felt like Stan Laurel wearing Oliver Hardy's suit.'<sup>2</sup> The American comic actor is already mentioned in the first narrative of our corpus, *The Blinder*, in a humorous simile thus: 'It is not the slightest use blinding the examiner with an original thesis on Oliver Hardy if he asks for your knowledge of Oliver Cromwell.'<sup>3</sup>

In *Elvis Over England*, Eddie's allusions nostalgically refer to his youth. A sole reference is enough to draw a whole background like the allusion to Jerry Lee Lewis's turbulent personal life. Eddie recounts the uproar caused by the marriage of the American musician with his cousin who was only 13 years old. His tour in Britain was cancelled because of the scandal. Eddie's wild imagination mingles facts, fiction and fantasy: 'When they were planning their route on the map, Eddie used to imagine taking Pearl along with them and getting married at Gretna Green. They would be in all the papers, like Jerry Lee Lewis and his teenage bride.'<sup>4</sup> Snippets kindle the hero's memories: 'But Jimmy Cagney's defiant cry reminded him of his own mother and he lapsed into melancholy.'<sup>5</sup> The truculence of this American actor is famous through the scene in which he smashes a grapefruit in Mae Clark's from the film, *The Public Enemy*, in 1931. The appropriation of the data from popular culture by Eddie is on a par with his wacky personal and geographical tribulations.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 173

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 111

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 186

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 136

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 116

The personal and original use of popular culture echoes John Fiske's theory of the assimilation and the distortion of cultural data in *Understanding Popular Culture*. The positive involvement of the recipient is demonstrated thus: 'Working-class tastes, however, tend toward participation, that is, reader participation in the experience of the work of art, and the participation of work of art in the culture of everyday life.'<sup>1</sup>

The American actor, John Wayne, is also alluded to in *Elvis Over England*. Snippets of universal trivia suffice to build up a semblance of a world in which Eddie can escape and where he strives to hide from reality. Exaggerations and make-believe string the far-fetched episodes in a hilarious sequence: 'Let me see now, I must have seven, eight, maybe ten thousand head of longhorn, I guess.' Eddie was John Wayne now at the beginning of the cattle drive in Rio Grande.'<sup>2</sup> The reaction of the bemused Scottish peasant illustrates the implicit complicity based on commonly shared cultural notions: 'The farmer didn't look impressed. Wearing a Boddingtons T-shirt and his arms swarming with tattoos, Eddie didn't look much like a beef baron. Unless he was like that Howard Hughes chap he had read about who was worth billions but dressed like a tramp.'<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines delves at will into cinematographic lore. Here is the tongue-in-cheek image of a would-be film-maker: 'I'm going to Kevin's house to look at the video of the crash. He thinks he's Steven Spielberg, with that camera.'<sup>4</sup> The sole reference to the famous American film director suffices, just as the mention to his 1975 thriller film entitled *Jaws* did in *The Heart of It*: 'He laughed when he saw the rocks and plastic bags of gravel and aquatic plants spread out on the table. It looks like the set of *Jaws*.'<sup>5</sup> The cinematographic references bring humour and touches of relief. The following allusions rely on household names act in a similar way in *Elvis Over England*: 'A dog barked and Eddie laughed when he heard Betty shout, 'Lassie! Shut up!' I bet he's got a cat called Tom, Eddie thought, as he opened his mother's front gate.'<sup>6</sup> Flashbacks from the protagonist's happy-go-lucky youth serve to create a nostalgic backdrop:

The regular joke amongst the customers was that if you made a date with somebody in the Cats Eyes, you never recognized them when you met them next time. Burt Lancaster turned into Boris Karloff overnight, and the boy who arranged to go to the

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<sup>1</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p.138

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 114

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 115

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 11

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 235

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 11

pictures with Marilyn Monroe found himself sitting next to Old Mother Riley, hoping and praying that none of his mates would see him.<sup>1</sup>

Analogous hints to the American actress crop up throughout the successive narratives as the mere name is synonymous with beauty and sex-appeal. She is mentioned in Barry Hines's first novel, *The Blinder*, by the flattering young protagonist: 'You've got a body like Marilyn Monroe.'<sup>2</sup> In *The Gamekeeper* a ferret is humorously named after her: 'His wife and the boys called her Marilyn, because Mary said she was as blond as Marilyn Monroe.'<sup>3</sup>

The cinema offers a way out of the daily humdrum. A sole reference suffices to trigger happy memories: 'It's like the cars on the films I used to see at the Alhambra, Pearl thought, as she watched the Cadillac creep forward in the solid line of traffic, with courting couples necking in the back seat at the drive-in movie.'<sup>4</sup> Whatever the generation the cinema embodies dreams and flight from the everyday treadmill as Eddie's son reveals: 'his old man, an old rocker with thinning, slicked-back hair was grinning at him from a gleaming soft top, straight out of Hollywood.'<sup>5</sup> Past and present overlap as flashbacks hint at happy times: 'They performed light, deft moves, with Eddie taking the lead. Pearl was amazed at his skill. She could see people admiring them from the side. Tarzan had turned into Fred Astaire!'<sup>6</sup> Humour always stems from absurd situations: 'He didn't know much about the behaviour of cattle. He wasn't sure if they would turn vicious and charge and he would have to fight them off like Victor Mature in *Demetrius and the Gladiators*.'<sup>7</sup> The reference to the 1954 film is used humorously to corroborate historical data. The mere mention of a cinematographic genre conjures up clichés steeped in popular culture. Barry Hines's literary technique recurrently uses these stereotypes like the implicit comparison woven in the plot of *The Gamekeeper* which unravels thus: 'It was so loud that the gamekeeper thought it might cause a cave in, like gun shots cause avalanches in canyons on cowboy films.'<sup>8</sup> Commonplaces also help to release the pent-up tension due to the impending strike in *First Signs*. The images associated with the westerns are sketched in a jocular way as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 90

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 107

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 32

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 37

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 36

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 92

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 112

<sup>8</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 131



The question provoked a knowing murmur in the crowd. It was that sound familiar to all connoisseurs of Western films, when the townspeople are gathered outside the saloon, bank, or sheriff's office and the trouble-maker makes a telling point.<sup>1</sup>

The industry of cinema has shaped contemporary British working class culture, but it has also changed the image of contemporary British working class. Sociologists associate the debunking of this social class with its representation perpetrated by cinema in the 20th century. Owen Jones retraces the historical evolution of British cinema by opposing the soaring interest for working-class topics after the Second World War with the scathing scorn for such issues from the 1980s onwards. The discussion in *Chavs* sums up Stephen Frears's testimony as follows: 'The war changed everything. (...) Novels started being about the working classes. Plays started being about the working classes. I found all of that very, very interesting.'<sup>2</sup> The limitations of this kind of cinema are plainly drawn in a quotation by the historian David Kynaston used in Owen Jones's sociological study:

If you think about the portrayals of the working class in the films of the immediate post-war period, often they show working-class people as sorts of buffoons, but not as villains or unpleasant. It was more kind of one-dimensional. They might be uncouth, but nevertheless not bad people.<sup>3</sup>

This is exactly the impression conveyed by Barry Hines's characters in the nine novels of our study. They stand out as stereotyped representatives of the working-class with their flaws and limitations. They appear as 'rough diamonds' but they remain likeable because of the author's deep-seated empathy which translates throughout his literary works. This feeling never flags contrarily to the reversal in the image generally conveyed by the British media in the two last decades of the 20th Century. Owen Jones explains the outright change of outlook: 'There was a big leap from being patronized to being despised. The shift would come with the advent of Thatcherism and its assault on what you could call working-classness –working-class values, institutions, industries and communities.'<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines draws the evolution of British popular culture throughout the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century thanks to a plethora of references to the film industry. The working-class members appropriate these cultural parameters into their own interpretation and this specific apprehension constitutes contemporary working-class culture. Yet this facet of culture remains subordinate to the political message which the committed author strives to convey. The growing awareness

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 231

<sup>2</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonisation of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 110

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 111

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 111

experienced by the hero of *The Heart of It* during his visit to his ailing father contrasts with his past mercantile script-writing which ironically reads thus:

It was worth doing if the money was right. It was as simple as that. He couldn't afford the luxury of a social conscience, and anyway who wants to pay good money to see films about unmarried mothers throwing themselves off balconies of high-rise flats? Or some cunt freezing to death in a cardboard box?<sup>1</sup>

Cinema stands out as the main form of entertainment for the working-class members in Barry Hines's works. The countless allusions to films prove its prime part in working-class culture as the mere reference conjures up a whole set of common data.

The next part of this chapter deals with a similar phenomenon of appropriation and distortion which is applied to literature.

#### **4. 3 Literature.**

Which books do the members of the working-class described in the nine novels by Barry Hines of our study read, if any? Very few, indeed. This loathing and mistrust for books are explained by John Fiske in *Understanding Popular Culture* as he harks upon age-old categories of 'high-brow' and 'low-brow' literature: 'How can a text be popular when it is used to discriminate among individuals and to train people into the habits of thought and feeling of another class?'<sup>2</sup> This statement is redolent of Raymond Williams's analysis of the shortcomings of the novel as a literary form in *The Welsh Industrial Novel*: 'The received conventional plots – the propertied marriage and settlement; the intricacies of inheritance; the exotic adventure; the abstracted romance- are all, for obvious reasons, at a distance from the working-class life.'<sup>3</sup> The lecturer matches the rise of the novel with the growing power acquired by the middle class and deems it intrinsically inimical with working-class culture. This may explain the lack of interest for classics which is a common feeling vented by writers from the working-class, and which highlights the failure of education. Stephen Foster vents his reluctance in this excerpt from *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*: 'I took only a partial interest in Eng Lit due to the fact that far too much of the material set before us was written in a dreary, archaic language and featured a ludicrous and implausible plot.'<sup>4</sup> The writer's literary awakening and discovery echo Barry Hines's. Stephen Foster's allusions

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 99

<sup>2</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p.121

<sup>3</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, University College Cardiff Press, 1979, p. 9

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p 41

constitute a somewhat tongue-in-cheek, yet sincere, tribute to specific novels and novelists – notably Barry Hines! The characteristics of a “good” book repeat the same criteria thus:

A Kind of Loving painted a world that was recognisable to us, similar to the one we went home to. There were other books like this: The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner by Alan Sillitoe and A Kestrel for a Knave by Barry Hines, which we had seen on television as the film Kes.<sup>1</sup>

The lack of interest for literature from the representatives of the popular group mirrors Barry Hines’s testimony in *This Artistic Life*:

English literature was reading books about people who had been dead for hundreds of years. They had to be dead for that long or it wasn’t literature. (...)

It was all too posh. I resented it. I felt I was being imposed upon by middle-class teachers in a middle-class institution glorifying upper-class values.

I wanted to read about a world I could indentify with, where people had to work for a living.<sup>2</sup>

Reading is certainly not the favourite pastime of Barry Hines’s protagonists as the conversation between Billy Casper and his brother testifies in *A Kestrel for a Knave*: ‘Nicking books.’ He looked at a picture, than slapped it shut. ‘I could understand it if it wa’ money, but chuff me, not a book’.<sup>3</sup> The dumbfounded amazement voiced in the previous excerpt is similar to Pearl’s reaction to her husband’s excuse for being late at the family gathering after his mother’s burial in *Elvis Over England*:

‘I was reading.’

That shut her up. Pearl thought that she had heard every conceivable excuse from him for being late, but this was a new one, the daddy of them all. It was even more implausible than his story about chasing the escaped llama from a circus on his way home from the pub.

‘Reading? Reading what?’<sup>4</sup>

Working-class protagonists’ knowledge is limited to measly rudiments dating back from their schooling, or gleaned from the cursory browsing of magazines, or from television programmes. Any allusion to literature remains synonymous with school memories as the dialogue between Mick Walsh and his girlfriend shows in *Looks and Smiles*: ‘There’s a good one at the Odeon. It’s about a tempest.’ ‘What do you mean, Shakespeare?’ ‘No, not that one. It’s about a nuclear explosion that disturbs the atmosphere or something, and it starts raining

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Foster, *From Working-class Hero to Absolute Disgrace*, Short Books, Pine Street, 2009, p.42

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, Reading, 2009, pp. 67 & 68

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 35

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p.20

and it won't stop.'<sup>1</sup> The references to William Shakespeare are the most frequent as he symbolises scholarly knowledge. The following conversation from *Unfinished Business* evinces the schism between the workers' interest and literature:

'What's Lucy studying at university, Phil?'  
'English Literature.'  
'What, Shakespeare and that?'  
'I suppose she must be, I've seen Hamlet lying around the house.'<sup>2</sup>

Barry Hines resorts to jokes to stress the rejection of the so-called highbrow literature by the working-class representatives. The allusions stud the narrative of this novel which relates the heroine's studies in the face of her family's disapproval. The literary references need no further explanations as they conjure up well-known elements: 'To be or not be. That's the fucking question, isn't it, Phil?'<sup>3</sup> The puns sound hackneyed and reminiscent of schoolchildren's humour as the following passage illustrates: 'She was writing an essay on a poet called Donne last night.' (...) 'Don who?'<sup>4</sup> In a similar vein, the play-on-words on the name of an English metaphysical poet echoes that of a fictional comic superhero thus: 'I prefer Marvell myself.' ('Captain Marvell!' Phil had shouted, when he had read the name on the cover. 'I didn't know he wrote poetry as well.')5 The previous excerpt from *Unfinished Business* repeats virtually word for word the facetious conversation in *The Blinder*:

'Marvell's poems.'  
'I didn't know he wrote poems;'  
'Who?'  
'Captain Marvel.'<sup>6</sup>

Literature appears as the prerogative of the upper social classes as the following extract from *A Kestrel for a Knave* demonstrates. The off-the-cuff conversation between Billy Casper and Mr Farthing, his English teacher, as they are admiring the tame falcon reveals the cultural gap: 'It reminds me of that poem by Lawrence, "If men were as much as lizards are lizards they'd be worth looking at.'<sup>7</sup> This literary quotation certainly escapes the working-class teenager's grasp and the lack of understanding raises the question about the purpose of literature.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 69

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 47

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 48

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 47

<sup>5</sup> Op. cit., p. 48

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p.67

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 119

Comics seem more to the working-class members' liking and that is exactly what Barry Hines's characters browse through. In a *Kestrel for a Knave*, Billy Casper stops during his paper-round to read: 'He pulled out the Dandy and immediately to Desperate Dan.'<sup>1</sup> The stereotyped image is summed up as one of the strongest men in the world as he can lift a cow with a single hand, and the cliché of the toughest beard worldwide as he must shave with a blowtorch. The publication of this magazine dates back to December 4<sup>th</sup> 1937 and spans the different generations of readers. The plot is re-transcribed with onomatopoeias and with exclamations. Whole words and expressions appear in capital letters or in italics to convey the vitality of the amusing scenario which supersedes temporarily the youngster's bleak plight. The jerky style follows the far-fetched episodes of comic strips and complies with the classical rendering of the oral dialogues. The literary conventions are flouted through the omission of brackets and the use of italics to highlight the catchwords. The repetitions copy the young reader's hurried reading and enthusiasm. The teenager's fleeting flight from the daily treadmill is achieved.

The fame of this comic endures as it is alluded to in the latest novel of our corpus: *Elvis Over England*. The hero, or maybe anti-hero, describes himself and takes stock of his own life as follows in a string of negative sentences and colourful alliterations building up a crescendo: 'He had to admit it. He wasn't handsome. He wasn't young. And he was certainly no stud. He was fat, fifty-five and fucked.'<sup>2</sup> Desperate Eddie compares himself in a derogatory way to Desperate Dan. The mere allusion succeeds in conjuring up implicit data without resorting to any further explanation: 'Who wants to ride with a Desperate Dan look-alike?'<sup>3</sup> Comics as a cultural reference recur only a few lines later as Eddie loses his temper and vents his anger against a lorry-driver he accuses of cutting him up. The universally-known figure of Popeye and the inseparable spinach is hinted at humorously:

Calm down. Calm down, he ordered himself. You'll have a fucking heart attack if you're not careful. It was like a long fuse and when the driver in front picked up his mobile, the bomb exploded prematurely. It seemed like a deliberate provocation to Eddie and, like Popeye, he had stood all he could stand and couldn't stand no more. Spinach coursed through his veins as he squeezed down on the accelerator and rumbled up alongside the tormentor, making no attempt to overtake.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 15

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 153

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 163

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 163

The pathetic figure of Eddie backed up by a tongue-in-cheek reference to the illustrious caricature of Popeye illustrates the impact of comics in popular culture once again in *Elvis Over England*. The contrast between the gallant stalwart and the desperate Eddie reads thus: 'My wife says I can't keep it; I've to bring it back.' Popeye wouldn't stand for it, he thought, watching a battleship appear in his bicep after squeezing a can of spinach down his throat. He went hot with shame at the thought of it.'<sup>1</sup> The cartoon fictional character created by Elzie C. Segar in 1929 was already cited for his near-saintly perseverance in *The Gamekeeper*. The tongue-in-cheek comparison reads as follows: 'Like Popeye, the terrier had stood all he could stand.'<sup>2</sup>

Barry Hines's recurrent hints to comics elicit their specific place in popular culture. Stereotyped elements are used as landmarks like in the caricature of Mr Sugden, the sports teacher, in *A Kestrel for a Knave*. The depiction does not need any explanation whatsoever as the spotless athletic figure of the sportsman is sketched ironically: 'The legs were tucked into new white football socks, neatly folded at his ankles, and his football boots were polished as black and shiny as the bombs used by assassins in comic strips.'<sup>3</sup> A similar image is conjured up by the mere allusion to *The Beano* in *Looks and Smiles*. The knowledge spans the succeeding generations as this publication first appeared on July 30th 1938 and it is still a household name. The reference to the comics suffices to evoke the outlandish clothes worn by the characters such as Dennis the Menace's famous 'red and black' jersey, or Roger the Dodger's chessboard design top. Here is the criticism of the jacket which Mick intends to wear for an interview: 'It's too loud. All them checks. You look like somebody out of the *Beano*.'<sup>4</sup> The stereotypes conveyed by the cartoon are implicitly alluded to in *Unfinished Business* through the name: 'Walter': 'Lucy presumed that she was referring to Dennis the Menace's chief victim in the *Beano*.'<sup>5</sup> This reference automatically harks back to the feud between the opposite gangs of schoolboys. The author's countless facetious hints at cartoons bestow them with a specific status in stark contrast with the disparaging comments uttered by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*:

At the lowest level all this is illustrated in the sales here of the American or American-type serial-books of comics, where for page after page big-thighed and big-bosomed girls from Mars step out of their space- machines, and gangsters' molls scream away in high-powered sedans. Anyone who sees something of Servicemen's reading, of the

<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 44

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 145

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 87

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 126

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 125

popularity of American and English comics (with the cruder English boys' comics serving their turn where the supply of hotter material runs out), knows something of all this. The process continues, for a substantial number of adolescents especially; a passive visual taking-on of bad mass-art geared to a very low mental age.'<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines picks familiar archetypes from different domains of popular culture. Household landmarks such as Punch and Judy crop up throughout the narratives. The first mention of this traditional puppet show occurs in *The Blinder* to describe a couple serving in a pub: 'It was like watching the audience from inside a Punch and Judy show.'<sup>2</sup> The following allusion to the jest in *A Kestrel for a Knave* features in the description of Billy Casper's desperate attempts to avoid his sports teacher's reprisals. The wanton violence of the punishment and the hopelessness of the youngster are symbolically conveyed:

Nobody moved. They continued to stare at the partition wall as though a film was being projected on to its tiled surface.

Then Billy appeared over the top of it, hands, head and shoulders, climbing rapidly. A great roar arose, as though Punch had appeared above them hugging his giant cosh.<sup>3</sup>

The same common cultural data are used in *The Price of Coal* in the following gleeful passage as the miners preparing for Prince Charles's visit are joking and larking around. In keeping with typical working-class humour the boss seizes the reference which rebounds and is thus distorted into a pun: 'Hey up, Ken. You're just in time, we're waiting for the Punch and Judy to start.' 'I'll give you Punch and Judy...' The curtain hanger did not reveal the plaque again now that the Deputy had arrived'.<sup>4</sup> The references are understood by all classes and it is exactly the popularisation of culture that Richard Hoggart censures in *The Uses of Literacy*. Not only does he bewail the decreasing number of publications but he lampoons this as a wilful stratagem to curb the lower classes' access to information:

The price paid for this in popular reading is that a small group of imaginatively narrow and lamed publications are able to impose a considerable uniformity. These publications must aim to hold their readers at a level of passive acceptance, at which they never really ask a question, but happily take what is provided and think of no change.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 201

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Blinder*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1966, p. 158

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 108

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 25

<sup>5</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 237

The sociologist John Fiske bemoans the paucity of popular literature in *Understanding Popular Culture* as follows: 'The poverty of the individual text and the emphasis on the constant circulation of meanings mean that popular culture is marked by repetition and seriality, which, among other effects, enable it to fit easily with the routines of everyday life.'<sup>1</sup> He underlines the infringement of mass consumption to all domains: 'Popular texts are to be used, consumed, and discarded, for they function only as agents in the social circulation of meaning and pleasure; as objects they are impoverished.'<sup>2</sup> The debunking of literature from its pedestal adumbrates its appropriation by the working-class which features in Barry Hines's narratives through the plethora of puns.

Real publications are mentioned throughout Barry Hines's novels and the household names spans the successive decades. In *Elvis Over England*, the names of different magazines are used to conjure up the farcical episodes: 'Eddie stood back and appraised his work. It wasn't *Gardeners' World*, but it was a start, and he resolved to visit the grave regularly and to keep it in good order.'<sup>3</sup> The same process based on puns recurs in the following passage outlining a boastful Eddie pretending to be an American holiday-maker and complaining about the exchange rate. The humour stems from the attendant's candid reply thus: 'I wouldn't know. The only exchange I ever see is *Exchange and Mart*.'<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines's neutrality contrasts with the outright condemnation of the evolution of the magazines devoted to the popular class by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*:

The magazines go beyond the stories to the 'short short stories' or the 'one-minute stories', of which the most striking quality is not their brevity but the skill with which they have been designed to slide down. Since nothing must impede the flow, there is nothing a reader can ever get a grip on, nothing real about the world they are supposed to create. Read twenty or thirty of them in succession; you will not only be surfeited with the fraudulent twist-endings, but weighed down with a sense of having lived in a slick and hollow puppet-world'.<sup>5</sup>

Which newspapers do Barry Hines's protagonists read? Apparently, very few. Sweeping generalisations transmitted by the press shape the protagonists' outlook and conjure up humorous scenes in *Elvis Over England*:

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<sup>1</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p.125

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p.123

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p. 4

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p.85

<sup>5</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, pp. 200 & 201



Perhaps he was a weirdo, a serial killer who stopped people in lonely places, and if they didn't answer the question correctly, he blew them away, then stuffed the body in the boot of his car. Such things did happen. It happened all the time in America. He had read about it in the *Daily Sport*.<sup>1</sup>

Several comical episodes are based on similar biases: 'The first person he had seen for miles and he turns out to be a village idiot. It was due to all that inbreeding out in the country. He had read about it in the *Daily Sport*.'<sup>2</sup> The faith in the written word is also illustrated in *The Price of Coal*. The crucial part held by the local press is demonstrated by the recourse to the article relating the mine accident back in 1912 which is recopied in a different topographical format. 'It's from the local paper at the time.'<sup>3</sup> In the second part of this novel the criticism of the press waxes scathing as journalists stream onto the scene of the accident to report on the latest news. Here is the blunt condemnation voiced by Kath, one of the casualties' wives: 'You make me poorly you lot. You come here, writing sob stories, reckoning to sympathize, but you don't care a damn really, do you?'<sup>4</sup> The rejection of the press as a whole at the beck and call of the bosses and of the leading classes runs throughout the working-class literature, and Barry Hines's writings are no exception.

A sole element suffices to conjure up the image of a specific newspaper in *A Kestrel for a Knave*: 'He swung round, holding the poker like the *Daily Express* knight.'<sup>5</sup> The importance played by the press is implicitly stressed as a sole reference suffices. This topic crops up in William Woodruff's auto-biography, *The Road to Nab End*, as the historian recalls the gamut of the different newspapers he delivered: 'I had no difficulty knowing which paper went where. Labour people took the *Herald* or *News Chronicle*, conservatives the *Mail* or the *Telegraph*, liberals the *Guardian*, the toffs took *The Times*.'<sup>6</sup> The political affiliations of the diverse newspapers are scrupulously respected in Barry Hines's novels. In *Unfinished Business* the following excerpt mocks the simplistic rift between lowbrow and highbrow reading: 'This is not the usual level of my reading material, I can assure you,' Mr Pybus said, placing the comic on a tripod table in a corner. (...) 'Oh, I don't know. It's about on a par with the *Telegraph* I would have thought.'<sup>7</sup> The presence of a newspaper in a household stamps their political tenets. This is the case for the Rickards family whose beliefs are

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Elvis Over England*, London, Penguin, 1998, p.121

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 121

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 41

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 149

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *A Kestrel for a Knave*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1968, p. 149

<sup>6</sup> William Woodruff, *The Road to Nab End*, Abacus, 1999, p. 312

<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines, *Unfinished Business*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1983, p. 183

indirectly revealed in *The Heart of It*: 'His parents sitting in deckchairs with his father reading the *Daily Worker*. Cal couldn't read the headline, but it wouldn't be a rib-tickler, he was certain of that,'<sup>1</sup> and 'He fetched several back copies of the *Morning Star* from the newspaper rack.'<sup>2</sup> Flashbacks and current acts delineate the chronological events with scrupulous realism. In a similar way, in *The Changing Forest* Dennis Potter highlights the importance of the press as a marker of social and political class and status:

'I see that you take the *Daily Telegraph*, then?'

(...) After a momentary pause, the husband, who worked in an office now (and had once worked in the pit) thought that an explanation was needed. (...) 'We used to take the *Herald*. Our dad used to have the *Worker* – and I didn't think I'd ever read this. But they all do on the bus – anyway, a good many of them do.' (...) 'Besides, they all take the *Telegraph* in the office.'<sup>3</sup>

Raymond Williams voices a scathing condemnation of the modern literary works in *Culture and Society*. Here is the extremely bleak conclusion he draws about the invasion of mass culture as he targets both the servility of the producers and the stupidity of the audience:

Ask any journalist, or any copywriter, if he will now accept that famous definition: 'written by morons for morons.' Will he not reply that in fact it is written by skilled and intelligent people for a public that hasn't the time, or hasn't the education, or hasn't, let's face it, the intelligence, to read anything more complete, anything more careful, anything nearer the known canons of exposition or argument? Had we not better say, for simplicity, anything good?'<sup>4</sup>

The gap between low-brow and high-brow literature appears unbridgeable in spite of the focus on the growing awareness and the active interest in the elaboration of their cultural items by the members of the popular class, which John Fiske advocates in *Understanding Popular Culture*. The sociologist's breakthrough expounds a new approach of culture by the members of the popular class:

To be popular, the commodities of the cultural industries must not only be polysemic – that is, capable of producing multiple meanings and pleasures – they must be distributed by media whose modes of consumption are equally open and flexible. Television, books, newspapers, records, and films are popular partly because their nature as media enables them to be used in ways in which the people wish to use them. As they cannot impose their meanings on people, neither can they impose the way they are received into everyday life.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 93

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 56

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Potter, *The Changing Forest*, Minerva, 1962, p. 68

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780 - 1950*, Chatto and Windus, 1958, p. 305

<sup>5</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p.158

John Fiske's optimistic outlook about the evolution of popular culture relies on his faith in human resourcefulness and refusal to be indoctrinated. It refutes the notion of upper and lower classes reminiscent of the 'them and us' partitioning of British society. It challenges the stilted set-up of the making, the distribution and the consumption of the multifarious items of popular culture. The researcher's definition of the new network of popular culture as a means of rebellion against the leading classes is detailed thus in *Reading The Popular*:

Popular culture is made by subordinated peoples in their own interests out of resources that also contradictorily, serve the economic interests of the dominant. Popular culture is made from within and below, not imposed from without or above as mass cultural theorists would have it. There is always an element of popular culture that lies outside social control, that escapes or opposes hegemonic forces. Popular culture is always a culture of conflict, it always involves the struggle to make social meanings that are in the interests of the subordinate and that are not those preferred by the dominant ideology. The victories, however fleeting or limited, in this struggle produce popular pleasure, for popular pleasure is always social and political.<sup>1</sup>

John Fiske underlines the ambiguity and the limits of popular literary culture as he stresses the inter-relations between the various strata of society in the making of cultural items. Yet he stresses the impact of the original popular consumption which appropriates, assimilates and distorts; this whole innovative process amounts to the utter re-appropriation of a product from outside and its complete transformation for its use inside the popular groups. Here is the scientist's description of the formula applied to literary matters in *Reading the Popular*:

Popular texts are inadequate in themselves - they are never self-sufficient structures of meanings (as some will argue highbrow texts to be), they are provokers of meanings and pleasure, they are completed only when taken up by people and inserted into their everyday culture. The people make popular culture the interface between everyday life and the consumption of the products of the cultural industries.<sup>2</sup>

The importance of consumerism in the new outlook of popular culture is summed up by Terry Eagleton in *The Idea of Culture* published in 2000:

Postmodern culture, conversely, is classless in the sense that consumerism is classless, which is to say that it cuts across class divisions while driving a system of production

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<sup>1</sup> John Fiske, *Reading the Popular*, Routledge, 2004, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 6

which finds such divisions indispensable. In any case, the consumption of a classless culture is nowadays increasingly the mark of the middle class.’<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines confutes the demise of working-class culture adumbrated by the critic of Marxist obedience. On the contrary he foregrounds its specificity in the face of external threats. His empathy for the popular characters emphasises their involvement in the modelling of their idiosyncratic culture. This upbeat viewpoint is on a par with John Fiske’s appraisal in *Understanding Popular Culture*: ‘All popular culture is a process of struggle, of struggle over the meanings of social experience, of one’s personhood and its relations to the social order and of the texts and commodities of that order.’<sup>2</sup> The complementary facets of popular culture studied in this chapter, that is to say television, cinema and literature, evolve due to outside forces which are mainly economic. Barry Hines stresses the adaptability of the working class through its unique appropriation and interpretation of these cultural components.

The novel entitled *The Heart of It* retraces the intellectual voyage and enlightenment of a working-class writer and raises the issue of the working-class literature. The protagonist voices his mercantile standpoint as follows in a conversation with his mother: ‘I was humiliated.’ ‘Why, because you thought it was bad?’ ‘No, because nobody bought it.’<sup>3</sup> His dashed hopes are reflected through his forlorn memories:

He had started out with high hopes and serious intentions. His novel, like many first novels, was thinly disguised autobiography. It was about a sensitive, working-class grammar-school boy who is bullied by the other boys on a council estate, somewhere in the provinces. He then goes off to university, never to return. The usual stuff.<sup>4</sup>

The prime place of autobiographies in working-class literature is corroborated by Raymond Williams in *The Welsh Industrial Novel* thus: ‘But in prose the forms which are nearest to him are the autobiography and the novel, and it is significant that for several generations it was the autobiography that proved most accessible.’<sup>5</sup> The pitfalls of this literary genre are bluntly lampooned by Barry Hines in *The Heart of It*: ‘You can read travel books for description.’<sup>6</sup> This novel sketches the hero’s flight from his environment, his peregrinations as a scriptwriter and his enlightened return to his roots. The loop is looped as the very last sentences of the narrative echo textually the incipit. The writer’s part is

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*, Blackwell, 2000, p. 125

<sup>2</sup> John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, Routledge, 2001, p. 28

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 237

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 142

<sup>5</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Welsh Industrial Novel*, University College Cardiff Press, 1979, p. 9

<sup>6</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 237

reminiscent of the theory propounded by the Marxist critic, Terry Eagleton in *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, who defines: ‘literature as social criticism and analysis, and the artist as a social enlightener.’<sup>1</sup> His analysis reads on: ‘literature should disdain elaborate aesthetic techniques and become an instrument of social development.’<sup>2</sup> This assertion encapsulates Barry Hines’s writings throughout the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the successive narrations mirror the societal changes and expound proposals for the betterment of the working class daily lives. His comments about his own literary achievement betray his modesty and his realistic perception of contemporary working-class as he confides to the journalist Richard Benson in *This Artistic Life*:

He is happy enough to talk about *A Kestrel for a Knave*, but struck by how long ago it all seems. There is no secret to its success, he says; it was because it ‘was about things they could see around them. For a lot of children, it will have been the first and last book they were ever given to read. If that was what they saw around them, they would be interested to read about those things’.<sup>3</sup>

Barry Hines realistically describes the scant impact of literature on the working-class. It is synonymous with highbrow knowledge. The self-questioning about his own role as a writer is implicitly raised.

The last part of this chapter deals with Barry Hines’s contribution to cinema and television and the impact of his message in these domains.

#### **4. 4 Political commitment through television and cinema.**

This chapter deals with the political commitment of Barry Hines in his novels, but especially through their adaptation to cinema with the film-maker Ken Loach. In 1969 the novel entitled *The Kestrel for a Knave* was adapted into the film named *Kes* produced by Tony Garnett. *The Price of Coal* was first written for a television series which broadcast in 1977 before being published in book form. The novel, *The Gamekeeper*, was adapted into a film in 1980. Last but not least, the film from the novel *Looks and Smiles* was entered into the 1981 Cannes Film Festival, where Ken Loach won the Young Cinema Award.

Barry Hines’s collaboration with Ken Loach has, without doubt, enhanced the importance of his novels. The convergence of the two men’s political and humanist outlooks underpins their work and their yearning to reach the popular classes. The film-maker’s

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<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Marxism and Literary Criticism*, Routledge, 1976, p. 43

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., p. 43

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Pomona, Reading, 2009, p. 164

viewpoint reads as follows in the introduction of *Loach and Loach* edited by Graham Fuller and published in 1998: ‘We are all equally important and drama is not the preserve of the middle class.’<sup>1</sup> His relentless condemnation of the pitfalls of the British class system has earned him criticisms which John Hill sums up as follows in the introduction to *Ken Loach. The politics of Film and Television*: ‘he is primarily a polemicist who places politics ahead of both “art” and “entertainment”.’<sup>2</sup> Yet his cinematographic work is in the same vein as his literary endeavour which is redolent of the definition expounded in Brecht-Lukacs debate in *Aesthetics and Politics* published in 1977. The writer’s endeavour to reach the working-class follows the same pattern:

It is in the interest of the people, of the broad working masses, to receive a faithful image of life from literature, and faithful images of life are actually of service only to the people, the broad working masses, and must therefore be absolutely comprehensible and profitable to them – in other words, popular.<sup>3</sup>

This yearning to prove and to convince by merely showing and explaining is akin to Barry Hines’s literary technique. The writer’s meticulous attention to details is inherent to his realistic rendition, especially as the changes due to mass consumption and globalisation are translated into his successive narrative. The relentless impact of history echoes the tenet developed by Georg Lukács thus: ‘Reality changes; in order to represent it, modes of representation must also change. Nothing comes from nothing; the new comes from the old, but that is why it is new.’<sup>4</sup> The prime importance of history in the elaboration of the literary texts is summed up as follows by Lilian R. Furst in *Realism*: ‘On the whole, the sociologically oriented Marxists tend to read the literary work as a reflection of an actual situation at a given historical moment, and hence to espouse a broadly mimetic approach.’<sup>5</sup> In Barry Hines’s depictions every detail, however trite, serves to show and to prove; the message is thus conveyed. This literary treatment contrasts with Brecht’s theory: ‘Art is not a mirror with which to reflect reality but a hammer with which to shape it.’<sup>6</sup> The realism which suffuses Ken Loach’s films stems from his unique camerawork which he defines as follows in his recollections about the shooting of *Kes*. The following excerpt features in *The Cinema of Ken Loach*, subtitled *Art in the Service of the People* by Jacob Leigh:

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<sup>1</sup> Graham Fuller, *Loach on Loach*, Faber and Faber, 1998, p. vii

<sup>2</sup> John Hill, *Ken Loach. The Politics of Film and Television*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 2

<sup>3</sup> Brecht-Lukács debate in Ronald Taylor ed., *Aesthetics and Politics*, London and New York, 1977, p. 80

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 82

<sup>5</sup> Lilian R Furst, *Realism*, Longman, 1992, p. 8

<sup>6</sup> Video : An Introduction to Brechtian Theatre youtube 1.0.oi19.4677.15421.0.189 (July 26, 2012)

I was aware at that time of not trying to let the camera do the work, but let the people in front of the camera tell the story, so that the camera was a sympathetic observer. And you had to get what was in front of the camera absolutely right and true, and it was right and true, and you photographed it sympathetically, then it would work.<sup>1</sup>

The participation of Barry Hines as the script-writer obviously accounts for the faithful adaptation of the novel. The particular importance that Ken Loach bestows on writers combined with the work of the cinematographer Chris Menges have stamped the realistic rendition of the film. In Ken Loach. *The Politics of Film and Television*, John Hill cites the film maker's assessment of writing as 'the most important act in the whole process of "filmmaking" and, although he rarely writes his own scripts, has consistently sought to 'work side-by-side with the writer.'<sup>2</sup> The realism of the script is enhanced by the director's filmic technique which he defines as follows in an interview with Graham Fuller in *Loach on Loach*: 'the effort shouldn't be to make the camera do all the work, but should be to make what is in from of the camera as authentic and truthful as possible.'<sup>3</sup> Ken Loach's tribute to Barry Hines unravels as follows in *Loach on Loach* by Graham Fuller:

I thought it (*A Kestrel for a Knave*) was a terrific piece of writing – it had a very good balance, it was neat and well shaped, and everything about it had a rightness. (The script was a collaboration, but I don't want to make anything of that. The film is so close to the book anyway.)

Working with Barry is a joy. He and I (...) were a similar age and from a similar background, and we see things in a similar way – the same kind of things make us smile.<sup>4</sup>

The geographical setting in *Barnsley* is realistically shown and even enhanced as Jacob Leigh implies thanks to the filmic technique: 'in *Kes*, the "calculated effect" is one which contributes to the sense of a realistic or naturalistic presentation.'<sup>5</sup> The film abides scrupulously by the tenor of the novel through the rendition of the setting, the protagonists' behaviours and the social relationships in the late 1960s. It also successfully reproduces the specificity of Barry Hines's literary treatment of realism based on the accurate descriptions through trivial details on the one hand, but especially on the use of humorous clichés as welcomed touches of relief to the bleakness of the account. In *The Cinema of Ken Loach*, Jacob Leigh pinpoints the specificity of Ken Loach's adaptation thus: 'Kes combines realistic

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach. Art in the Service of the People*, Wallflower Press, 2002, p. 60

<sup>2</sup> John Hill, *Ken Loach. The Politics of Film and Television*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 2 & 3

<sup>3</sup> Graham Fuller, *Loach on Loach*, Faber and Faber, 1998, p. 39

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 42

<sup>5</sup> Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach. Art in the Service of the People*, Wallflower Press, 2002, p. 66

techniques with dramatic and performance strategies to create a “metaphorical model of reality” that it presents predominantly from its protagonist’s point of view.’<sup>1</sup> The critic underscores the uniqueness of the film as he underlines the transposition of the humorous stereotypes to alleviate the bleakness of the plot:

For Loach and Barry Hines, though they produce a melodrama of protest, use clichés in dramatic situations and in performances. The pleasures that these “jolts of recognition” afford are largely humorous pleasures, and we feel these pleasures even in situations that are thematically quite sad.<sup>2</sup>

Kes demonstrates a degree of continuity with British traditional films about the working-class and contrasts with the British ‘new wave’ films. The scenario refutes the demise of the traditional British working-class in the late 1960s due to the advent of consumerism and mass culture. The hero does not benefit from the relative affluence and stands out as a social pariah. This message echoes the scathing criticism voiced by Barry Hines about the failure of the education system. The writer’s indicts the waste of the schooling which is just training the working-class youngsters for dead-end menial tasks. A similar censure is vented in *Looks and Smiles* which was published in the harsh economic recession of the early 1980s. The economic situation is characterised by rampant unemployment, and the plot focuses on the vain search for work by fully-trained school-leavers. The film by Ken Loach was initially made for Central Television, but it went on to win the prize for contemporary cinema at the 1981 Cannes Film Festival. The film-maker underscores the continuity between *Kes* and *Looks and Smiles* in the following excerpt quoted by John Hill in *Ken Loach. The Politics of Film and Television*:

*Kes* was about a kid who was fourteen; we just thought it would be interesting to see somebody who was about seventeen or eighteen now and how they were responding to adult experience – where families split up, what it’s like to tackle your first job, which became the problem of finding work and the effect that has on someone.<sup>3</sup>

The film depicts the working-class environment of the epoch by stressing the historical data with accuracy and realism. In the following excerpt from *The Cinema of Ken, Loach* Jacob Leigh analyses the failure of the film thus: ‘The film records what people were doing, how they were speaking, and what they were wearing in the early 1980s in Sheffield: watched twenty years later, Loach’s characteristic attention to details renders the film a period piece.’<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach. Art in the Service of the People*, Wallflower Press, 2002, p. 71

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 71

<sup>3</sup> John Hill, *Ken Loach. The Politics of Film and Television*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 159

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach. Art in the Service of the People*, Wallflower Press, 2002, p. 131



The stress on trivial data inherent to daily working-class culture echoes Barry Hines's literary vein. In Ken Loach. *The Politics of Film and Television*, John Hill voices Ken Loach's own disappointed analysis of the film: 'it was insufficiently hard-hitting and missed creating the outrage in the audience that should have been there.'<sup>1</sup> The evolution of the imagery of the working-class is stressed through the differences between *Kes* released in 1969 and *Looks and Smiles* filmed in 1981. This was the last collaboration between the writer and the film-maker, who opted for documentaries at this point. Work, or the lack of it, remains central throughout Ken Loach's films, just as it does throughout Barry Hines novels. The evolution of the perception of work by the working-class is underlined by John Hill through quoting Huw Beynon's headings: 'heroic labour, alienated labour and the destruction of labour.'<sup>2</sup>

In 1980 Ken Loach directed the feature-length film: *The Gamekeeper*, an adaptation of Barry Hines's novel which had been published five years before. The film-maker pays homage to the writer in *Loach on Loach* by Graham Fuller as he enthuses:

The subtleties of class are exposed by the gamekeeper's work and who he is and where he lives. Like all of Barry's work, the essence of it is very neat and simple and precise. The image of the gamekeeper as someone who protects land and the game birds by keeping out people like himself – other ordinary people – and maintaining it as a preserve for aristocrats to visit briefly once or a few times during the year when they destroy the birds he raised is very powerful.<sup>3</sup>

The uniqueness of this narrative in Barry Hines's works lies in the treatment of the hero's class alienation. The gamekeeper and his family are utterly isolated from the nobility: the Duke and his guests on the one hand, and from the inhabitants of the village and of the neighbouring council estate. The film reproduces the specificity of the geographical setting as Jacob Leigh underscores in *The Cinema of Ken Loach*: 'Between the country and the town lies the boundary between private and public land.'<sup>4</sup> The outright demarcation echoes Barry Hines's literary depiction which reads as follows in the novel entitled *The Gamekeeper*:

The smallholding was built in a clearing at the edge of the wood. The gamekeeper's cottage faced outwards towards arable land. Three fields away was the main road, which marked the boundary of the Duke's estate, and across the road stood the houses and maisonettes of the new council estate.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John Hill, *Ken Loach. The Politics of Film and Television*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 159

<sup>2</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 175

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 56

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach. Art in the Service of the People*, Wallflower Press, 2002, pp. 127 & 128

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 11

The crucial part bestowed on the setting in the filming is epitomized by the film-maker as he stresses the idiosyncrasies of this script. The intricate ramifications between concrete data and politics are enhanced by Ken Loach in The Gamekeeper Press Release in 1980 which Jacob Leigh quotes in The Cinema of Ken Loach:

The setting of the film is important to us. The people of South Yorkshire must be among the most politically sophisticated in the country with the experiences of the miners' strikes and the steelworkers' strike under their belts. Yet estates like the one shown in the film still exist side by side with the pits and the steelworks. In this area the social implications of the gamekeeper's job are sharply revealed.<sup>1</sup>

The literary presentation of the hero is unique in Barry Hines's writings through his invidious position neither belonging to 'them' or to 'us'. The working-class protagonist feels as an outcast, torn between his working-class roots and his past job in the steelworks and his present subservient activity of rearing pheasants which will be shot by the Duke and his hunting partners. Just like the narration, the film covers one full year in the life of George Purse. The passing of the seasons dictate the chores fulfilled by the protagonist and the whole plot revolves around his actions. The underlying theme of food in the novel through recurring allusions to meals lambasts the inequality between the classes. The most scathing censure reads thus: 'It was grouse for dinner at the Big House, and grouse for dinner at the Savoy Grill. For George Purse, it was chips and peas and a meat pie in a tin-foil tray from the supermarket on the council estate.'<sup>2</sup> The very last shot of the film refers to this passage to convey his political condemnation of the injustice. Ken Loach's and Barry Hines's censuring comments also concur about the inequality stemming from land ownership. The following excerpt from the novel:

All the land he could see belonged to the Duke. This was his beat, five thousand acres, and there were four more gamekeepers with equivalent acreage to police. And this was only the Duke's small estate. His main estate was in Wiltshire.<sup>3</sup>

The absurdity of the situation is sarcastically decried thus: 'The 9<sup>th</sup> Duke had won this wood and five hundred acres around it in a game of cards in the nineteenth century.'<sup>4</sup> The hero's solution hints at Marxist tenets as he ponders: 'Well, I suppose if anybody really did want to do owt, they'd have to get rid of them, nationalize all their land and such like.'<sup>5</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> Jacob Leigh, *The Cinema of Ken Loach. Art in the Service of the People*, Wallflower Press, 2002, p. 129

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 180

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 35 & 36

<sup>4</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 218

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Gamekeeper*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1975, p. 111

transcribes the working-class struggles onto the rural background as he envisions political changes only through fights and solidarity:

And they also knew that if the energy, solidarity and determination to win that went into industrial confrontations was ever harnessed and used for political ends, then even the Duke would not be immune from the repercussions that would follow major trade union victories.<sup>1</sup>

Marxist dogmas such as the nationalization of land, mines and factories recur throughout Barry Hines's narratives as the way to redress class inequalities. Ken Loach's adaptations of the three novels mentioned vent the same message through the use of verisimilitude in line with traditional British 'social realism'. The issue of the political effectiveness of realism as a form questions the impact of films about the working-class and accompanies the collaboration between Ken Loach and Barry Hines switching into television work. In Ken Loach. *The Politics of Film and Television*, John Hill explains this new venue through the yearning to reach a wider popular audience. The critic cites the film and television producer Tony Garnett, whose thirteen-year long association with Ken Loach, underlines the similitude of viewpoints: 'It was the very fact that realism was the form with which the television audience "felt most comfortable" that made it important for them to use it, no matter how "backward" the form might be claimed to be. It was, he suggests, the form that he could get his "Uncle Fred to watch" and, therefore, the one that he and Loach wanted to find a way of using'.<sup>2</sup> In 1977 Ken Loach directed *The Price of Coal* from an original script written by Barry Hines for the television programme *Play for Today* for the BBC. The first episode: 'Meet the People' was shown on March 29<sup>th</sup>, and the second: 'Back to Reality' on April 5<sup>th</sup>. The plot is based on two complementary stories: the Royal visit on the one hand and the depiction of the community coping after the pit disaster on the other hand. The message went virtually unnoticed in Jubilee year in spite of the unremitting commitment of Ken Loach, Barry Hines and the producer Tony Garnett. Once again Ken Loach pays tribute to Barry Hines's rendition of the working-class in an interview reported by Graham Fuller in *Loach on Loach*: 'The location, too, is very special, because miners are like urban workers, but the pits are usually in the countryside. That was something that Barry wrote very strongly about.'<sup>3</sup> The mitigated impact of the play may also be attributed to Barry Hines's mildness in his denunciation of social injustice as the following conversation between Ken Loach and Graham Fuller in *Loach on Loach* outlines:

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., pp. 188 & 189

<sup>2</sup> John Hill, Ken Loach. *The Politics of Film and Television*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 154

<sup>3</sup> *Loach on Loach* edited by Graham Fuller, Faber and Faber, 1998, p. 53

*The Price of Coal wasn't as militant as it would have been if it had been written by, say, Jim Allen.*

No. But then you can't go on making the same film every other day. It did raise political questions. But you try to raise them in a more subterranean way sometimes.<sup>1</sup>

Ken Loach is right in asserting that Barry Hines's subdued tone is just as efficient as the vivid and staunch support of socialism by the English playwright, Jim Allen, in *The Rank and File* (1971) and the 1975 serial *Days of Hope*. Yet the message conveyed by Barry Hines in *The Price of Coal* sounds scathingly critical of the British class system as Syd Storey explains his grievances to his son in simplistic terms thus: 'I think that them fish should be there for them who fish there regular. They're the ones who've the right to them. It's got to be the same for everybody. Fair shares across the board.'<sup>2</sup> The Marxist doctrine is also extolled after the pit accident as the novelist expounds the management of the mines by the colliers: 'What I mean is, if we were in charge of day to day running of things, and we were responsible for setting production targets, safety would be bound to improve, wouldn't it. We'd make sure that safety and production went hand in glove.'<sup>3</sup> Yet, the writer believes in working-class solidarity which supersedes specific political tenets as a collier claims: 'Communists? Most of them are not even members of the Labour Party. They're just officials who put the interests of the men first, that's all.'<sup>4</sup> The political indictment and proposals do not change during the successive economic upheavals and Barry Hines subsequently acted as script editor on Ken Loach's *The Navigators*, to replace Rob Dawber who died on 20 February 2001 just before the release of the film. The script decries the privatisation of the railways from 1994 and strikingly echoes *The Price of Coal*.

Barry Hines's political accusation had grown even fiercer under Margaret Thatcher's tenure in the early 1980s. In *Looks and Smiles* the censure and the proposals are voiced through Mick Walsh's candid diatribe as follows:

There's loads of jobs that want doing. What about our estate? There's a piece of wasteland near us where they've knocked some old houses down and it's been like that for ages now. My dad says they can't afford to build any new ones on it because of the expenditure cuts. It's daft! What about all the money they're paying out on the dole? And to send people on them work experience schemes? Why don't they give you that money to be in a proper job? Just think of all the apprentices they'd need if they started building them houses at the end of our street. It doesn't make sense, does

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit., p. 53

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *The Price of Coal*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1979, p. 75

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 131

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 47

it? There's all them people out of work and there's a waiting list for council houses as long as your arm.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's political standpoint is omnipresent in his novels and he recurrently stresses the importance of personal involvement. The yearning to act is the reason for Tom Renshaw's return in *First Signs*: 'I want to go back now and do something.' 'And make England a better place to live in?'<sup>2</sup> The hero's belief in the power of a united working class is vented repeatedly as he concludes: 'All we need is strong leadership at area and national level to fight these closures,'<sup>3</sup> and 'We want control for a start. The rest of it will come from that.'<sup>4</sup> The commendation of Communism is voiced in *The Heart of It* as the protagonist proudly claims: 'I always thought your dad was a bit of a Commie. He is a Communist. He's been a member of the Communist Party all his life.'<sup>5</sup> The vindication of the doctrine gains momentum as the hero delves into historical data:

It was a bastard of a place, the pit, but you couldn't beat it for solidarity. That's what the strike was about, you know. The miners were the only people Mrs Thatcher was scared of. She knew that if she could beat the miners, the rest of the unions would cave in and they'd be able to privatize everything. They had it all prepared. Did you ever read the Ridley Report?<sup>6</sup>

The protagonist supports his allegations with precise details: 'Power stations should be well stocked up with coal in case there was a long strike. Plans for importing coal and recruitment of non-union drivers for haulage firms. Welfare benefits cut off and specially trained police.'<sup>7</sup> Barry Hines resorts to historical landmarks to indict the policies: 'It's the last day of nationalization today. (...) Everything that he believed in and fought for had been destroyed.'<sup>8</sup> The message remains upbeat in spite of the successive setbacks as it encapsulates a nostalgic outline of a united and militant working-class as the following excerpt from *The Heart of It* illustrates:

He said that the greatest victory was in the struggle itself. But whether we lost it or not, what we did achieve was to show what you can do when people work together, and the pride that you feel when you're fighting for a cause. And what's happened since, with all the unemployment and that, has started to make people realise that perhaps selfishness and greed are not the answer.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *Looks and Smiles*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p. 144

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, p. 86

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., p. 188

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 193

<sup>5</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 66

<sup>6</sup> Op. cit., p. 109

<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., p. 109

<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., p. 274

<sup>9</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 278

Last but not least, Barry Hines wrote *Threads*, a docu-fiction directed by Mick Jackson, which won an award from the British Academy of Film and Television. It was broadcast on television on 23 September 1984, at 9.30 p.m. and achieved the highest ratings of the week as *The Listener* reported. This depiction of a nuclear attack set in Sheffield is certainly the bleakest of Barry Hines's works and abides by the writer's literary vein and political commitment. In *Let's All Hide in the Linen Cupboard* Jack Kibble-White quotes the writer's remarks that *Threads* "wasn't propaganda. It was even-handed. You can't take politics out of it, but it was showing the dangers of a nuclear war, showing what could happen if things got out of hand, and it was a time when people thought it could get out of hand."<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's political involvement remains just as adamant in the films, in the television series and in the novels. The commitment is obviously political through the censure of the class-ridden British society and the failure of the successive governments at preventing the rise of rampant unemployment. The eulogy of active participation reads as follows in *First Signs*: 'We've got to fight it. We've no choice because if our pit finishes then this village finishes. A whole way of life finishes, And that's bad.' (...) 'It's bad when the new way of life is no better though, isn't it? When it's changed to looking after profits and not people.'<sup>2</sup> The novelist debunks the principle of class-consciousness as innate and immutable. On the contrary it is the result of a personal choice and is synonymous with political awareness and action as the dialogue between father and son underlines: 'My politics are born of necessity. It's not hard to be a socialist after a lifetime in the pits. But with you it's different, you've been to University, you've got an education behind you.'<sup>3</sup>

The author successfully uses diverse complementary devices to address social and political issues and manages to reach a wider audience thanks to the relevance of his message which spans the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still endures today.

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Kibble-White, *Let's All Hide in the Linen Cupboard*, September 2001, website : [offthetelly.co.uk](http://offthetelly.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines, *First Signs*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1972, pp. 110 & 111

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *The Heart of It*, Michael Joseph Ltd, 1994, p. 101

## **Conclusion.**

I have chosen to study Barry Hines's works because of his unique status in contemporary British literature which is due to the singularity of his literary output through his exclusive focus on contemporary British working-class people and culture. His works combine the ten following novels: *The Blinder* (1966), *A Kestrel for a Knave* (1968), *First Signs* (1972), *The Gamekeeper* (1975), *The Price of Coal* (1979), *Looks and Smiles* (1981), *Unfinished Business* (1983), *The Heart of It* (1994) and finally *Elvis over England* published in 1998 on the one hand, with the play entitled *Two Men from Derby* which was aired by the BBC in 1976. Yet the specificity of his part as a committed writer lies in the fact that his message has been magnified through his collaboration with Ken Loach during the filming of three of the novels, namely *A Kestrel for a Knave*, *The Gamekeeper* in 1980 and *Looks and Smiles*. Besides, *The Price of Coal* was initially written as the script for a television series for the BBC. The uniqueness of his position also stems from his working-class roots which enable him to watch and analyse the contemporary working-class both from inside and outside. The pitfalls encountered by working-class authors are detailed by Richard Hoggart in *The Uses of Literacy*:

A writer who is himself from the working-classes has his own temptations to error, somewhat different but no less than those of a writer from another class. I am from the working-classes and feel even now both close to them and apart from them. In a few more years this double relationship may not, I suppose, be so apparent to me; but it is bound to affect what I say. It may help me to come nearer to giving a felt sense of working-class life, to avoid some of an outsider's more obvious risks of misinterpretation. On the other hand, this very emotional involvement presents considerable dangers.<sup>1</sup>

The similarity of Barry Hines's position questions the realism of his narrations even though the narrator pays thorough attention to the slightest detail. The first chapter of this study is devoted to the realistic rendition of the geographical setting through the analysis of the different elements from the region, the town, the district and the home. The precise description hints subtly at the slow but relentless re-shaping of the urban setting through the manifold depictions of the shops, the factories and the houses throughout the thirty years spanned by the narrations. This representation however ignores the swift alterations which Michael Collins deprecates in *The Likes of Us* published in 2004 as follows: 'Yet historically, the landscape of the urban working class has been subject to more change than elsewhere

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Hoggart, *The Uses of Literacy*, Penguin, 1981, p. 17

because of redevelopment, the arrival of migrants en masse, and incessant attempts to accommodate its dense population.’<sup>1</sup> The geographical metamorphosis goes hand in hand with the economic mutation from the former heavy industry to tertiary activities and the researcher criticises the impact of the closures of factories which amount to the utter loss of landmarks by the up-rooted manual workers. The following excerpt from the partly sociological and partly auto-biographical study sketches a new-fangled typical popular district:

Here, the obligatory McDonald’s, Asda, Woolworths remain, and kebab shops and those outlets that are a dry cleaner’s one day, video rentals the next, and finally an everything-for-a-pound-shop before the hardboard goes up and bill posters bury them, are slowly disappearing. TK Maxx has arrived with cut-price designer gear. There’s a multiplex, a massive bingo hall, Pizza Express, and increasingly, pubs and more pubs, where stocky men check for fake ID, and confide in headsets as though preparing for trouble or royalty.<sup>2</sup>

Barry Hines plays down the impact of these economic and historical upheavals on the working-class habitat and opts for a traditionally bleak industrial backdrop thus: ‘Those horrible blocks of flats, all those mucky factories and all that smoke pouring out? Those ramshackle houses down there, that faceless council estate? Well, yes, I say. Most people live and work in places like that.’<sup>3</sup> The deliberate choice to minimize the alterations to the everyday geographic setting underpins his political and humanist message which sounds steeped in a nostalgic era. The following excerpt from *This Artistic Life* corroborates the author’s fondness of the past even though he does admit the new outlay:

(...) in recent years, EU funding has brought new jobs and new regeneration-scheme landscapes. Spoil heaps are now grassed over and planted with trees; vast gleaming white call-centre complexes and retail parks stand where collieries and coking plants used to be; there are new red-and-beige housing developments and smooth new roads and brightly coloured distribution warehouses owned by globo-corps like IKEA.<sup>4</sup>

Barry Hines’s representation of working-class habitat therefore relies on stereotypes which transcend the succeeding decades and conjure up a traditional tableau.

An analogous treatment applies to the human representations, the topic of the second part of this study. The author’s depictions brim over with empathy for the characters. This leniency contrasts with the current stigmatization of the popular class which the journalist

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us*, Granta Books, London, 2004, p. 11

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., London, 2004, p. 241

<sup>3</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Hebden Bridge, Pomona, 2009, pp. 3 & 4

<sup>4</sup> Op. cit., p. 161



Julie Burchill illustrates by dint of precise examples. The sweeping criticisms generate the partitioning of this class into two antagonistic parts as she explains in the following article published on May 5th 2001 in the Guardian: ‘What we now have is a new version of the deserving and undeserving poor – the noble new British working class, who are ethnic, and the thoroughly swinish old working class, who are white.’<sup>1</sup> Michael Collins elicits this fracture which rends the contemporary British society asunder in *The Likes of Us*: ‘In media terms this was now the north / south divide, the contemporary take on Disraeli’s two nations: the urban, edgy, multicultural city dwellers and their burden – the culturally impoverished, hickish whites everywhere else.’<sup>2</sup> Barry Hines deliberately eschews the topics of racialism and immigration and this omission tints his outlook with an impression of timelessness and immutability. Concurrently the relationships within the working-class remain virtually unchanged and abide by the traditional ties between the generations and the genders. The advent of youth culture and the feminisation of the labour-force are acknowledged but the impacts of both societal phenomena on the working-class are deemed negligible.

The Manichean classification between ‘them’ and ‘us’ still applies, as the stereotyped imagery of professional groups outlined in the third chapter of this study, shows. The partitioning of the classes endures in spite of the economic up and downs during the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The classical representations of the manual jobs held by the working-class are underpinned by a plethora of accurate data. The author’s realistic rendition is extolled in an article by the journalist, Carol Midley, in *The Times* on November 5th 2005. The compliments uttered by the miners themselves about the television series *The Price of Coal* subsequently transcribed into a novel, are laconically expressed as follows:

When *The Price of Coal* was published in 1979 he worried that the miners might think he had misrepresented them. They read it and the succinct verdict came back: ‘That wer alright, Barry.’ It was the best praise he could have hope for.<sup>3</sup>

The writer vents his respect for the colliers in the following snippet from the partly auto-biographical *This Artistic Life* as he underlines the specificity of mining: ‘It’s a dangerous and it is hard work. And there’s pride in being able to do that, isn’t there? And they were good at it. They were very good at it.’<sup>4</sup> These melancholy memories conjure up the British working-class of only a few decades ago, which is still recognisable through its idiosyncrasies. Barry Hines’s representation abides by the stereotypes and stresses the

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<sup>1</sup> Julie Burchill, ‘*A Nasty Taste in the Mouth*’, *The Guardian*, 5 May 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Collins, *The Likes of Us*, Granta Books, London, 2004, p. 233

<sup>3</sup> Carol Midgley, A Yorkshire boy still working close to the coal face, *The Times*, November 5 2005

<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Hebden Bridge, Pomona, 2009, p. 168

resilience of the traditional social entity. This literary stance contrasts with his disillusioned conclusion to *This Artistic Life* as he deplores the loss of pride and purpose of the workers:

The people who made those things and designed them were proud of them. I mean, most of the blokes in Sheffield who worked in the steel factories were proud. You would be, if you were walking down the street in Brighton or somewhere and you saw 'Made in Sheffield'.<sup>1</sup> (...)

The use of the past tense translates Barry Hines's rueful awareness that work as a pivotal criterion for the working-class has all but vanished. His literary world remains, nevertheless, steeped in tradition and flouts the numerous changes which Fredric Jameson enumerates in his definition of post-modernism in *The Cultural Turn* sub-titled *Writings on the Postmodern, 1983 – 1998*:

At some point following World War Two a new kind of society began to emerge (variously described as post-industrial society, multinational capitalism, consumer society, media society and so forth). New types of consumption; planned obsolescence; an ever more rapid rhythm of fashion and styling changes; the penetration of advertising, television and the media generally to a hitherto unparalleled degree throughout society; the replacement of the old tension between city and country, centre and province, by the suburb and by universal standardization; the growth of the great networks of superhighways and the arrival of automobile culture – these are some of the features which would seem to mark a radical break with that older pre-war society in which high modernism was still an underground force.<sup>2</sup>

The historical era spanned by the writings of our study was the backdrop of unprecedented economic and social events which Barry Hines uses in the delineation of his plots. However he contents himself with describing the concrete outcome without overt proselytizing and the knowledge of the causes is implicitly taken for granted as the narrator dispenses with the historical data. In a different way Owen Jones underpins his critique with numerous details in *Chavs*, subtitled *The Demonization of the Working-Class*. The scathing censure of the policies and their negative future impact on the British society at large, and especially on the working-class reads thus:

The demonization of the working class cannot be understood without looking back at the Thatcherite experiment of the 1980s that forged the society we live in today. At its core was an offensive against working-class communities, industries, values and institutions. No longer was working class something to be proud of: it was something to escape from.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Hebden Bridge, Pomona, 2009, p. 169

<sup>2</sup> Fredric Jameson *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern 1983 – 1998*; Verso; London; 2009; pp. 19 & 20

<sup>3</sup> Owen Jones, *Chavs. The Demonization of the Working Class*, Verso, 2011, p. 40

Throughout his narratives Barry Hines refutes the scission, let alone the demise, of the British working-class. The nostalgic glimpse at a bygone world is stressed in *This Artistic Life* as he takes stock of the unremitting changes through the advent of the consumer society. He ruefully deplores the alteration in the human relationships and the cultural representations thus:

To me, the difference now is that it's as if people live in their house, like a bubble, watching television maybe, then get into their car, and then go to the supermarket, all that without talking to anyone. Maybe that's not bad, but if people are out a lot, it means you know each other and you feel safe, and you feel part of something, part of the village. I think it is important, but you know things change. People change.<sup>1</sup>

Barry Hines's message benefited from his collaboration with Ken Loach in the filming of *Kes* from the novel *A Kestrel for a Knave*, *The Gamekeeper* and *Looks and Smiles*. The showing on television of *The Price of Coal* and *Threads* allowed him to reach a wider audience. The collaboration with the British film maker highlighted the political scope and can be summed up with the terms used by Jim Allen in an interview in 1997 with the Tunisian critic, Karim Dridi, collected under the title *Citizen Ken Loach*. The socialist playwright insists on the main recurrent theme of the films: the struggle of working people and on the need to give a voice to people we would never hear. Jim Allen's avowal that they are always making the same film echoes Barry Hines's recurrent message in his novels and in his scripts. The writer's apparent naivety is encapsulated in his foreword to *This Artistic Life* as Barry Hines defines and proudly claims his commitment thus: 'The mainspring of my work is my political viewpoint.'<sup>2</sup> He expresses his endeavours to re-transcribe the characters realistically as follows: 'as long as the characters remain believable and do not degenerate into dummies merely mouthing my own beliefs.'<sup>3</sup> The impact of his works stems from the apparent artlessness and the simplicity of the plot and the style. The straightforwardness of the narratives is fully assumed as he asserts: 'My stories are all conventional in form. They have a beginning, a middle, and a sort of ending (mainly in that order), with the occasional flashback thrown in.'<sup>4</sup> Barry Hines's literary simplicity is actually contrived in order to reach a wider popular audience.

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Hines, *This Artistic Life*, Hebden Bridge, Pomona, 2009, p. 163

<sup>2</sup> Op. cit., foreword

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit., foreword

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